The SCARLET COCKEREL

C. M. SUBLETTE

$2000 HAWES PRIZE STORY 1925

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WHEN Charles Boardman Hawes, author of THE MUTINEERS, THE GREAT QUEST, and THE DARK FRIGATE (Newbery Medal book for 1923) died in the summer of 1923, The Atlantic Monthly Press offered a prize of $2,000 for a tale of adventure of the same general character and excellence as these three splendid stories. The prize was intended as a memorial to Mr. Hawes, whose untimely death at the age of thirty-four deprived a large public of further tales such as those in the writing of which he had no rival.

Of the scores of manuscripts submitted, THE SCARLET COCKEREL was the unanimous choice of the judges to receive the prize. The new author, who is thirty-seven years old, has never written a novel before, although he has published a number of short stories of the adventure type. Mr. Sublette is particularly interested in history and his novel has a distinctly historical background, being a 16th century tale of the French Huguenot colonists in the Carolinas and their difficulties with the Spanish from Florida.

THE SCARLET COCKEREL

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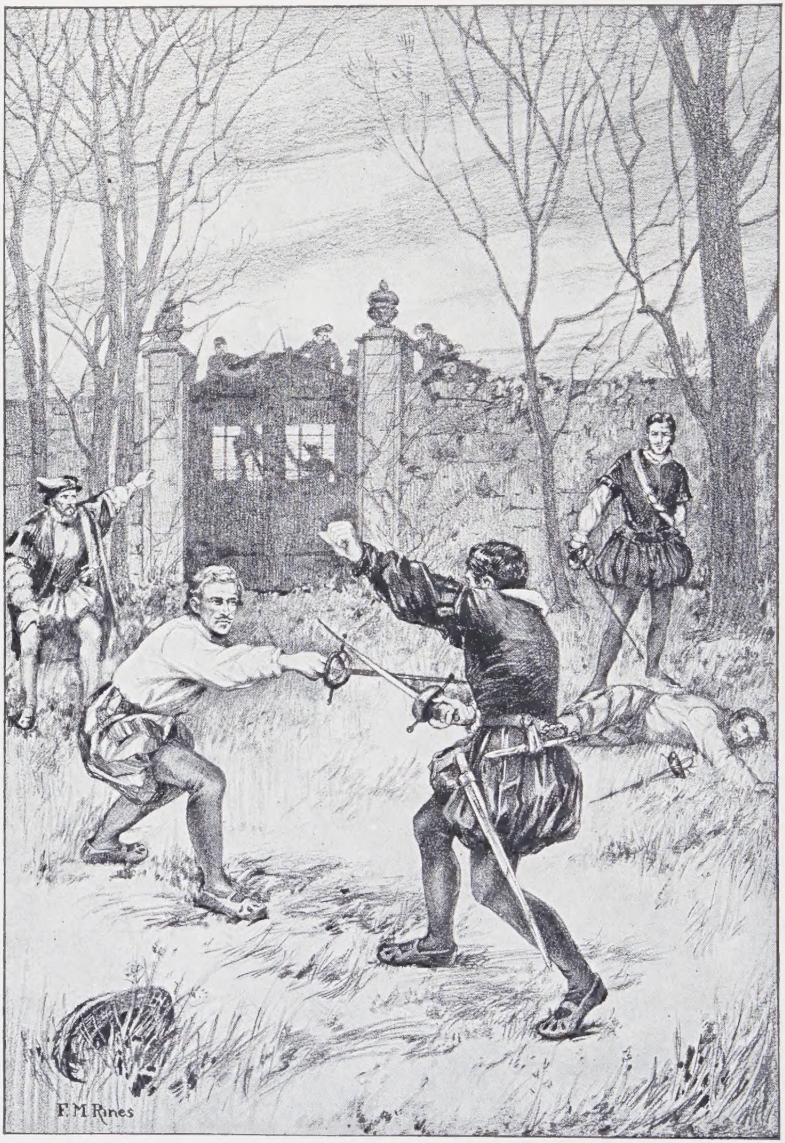

There was the sharp ring of steel on steel, a sibilant clash as the blades met and parted

THE SCARLET COCKEREL

A Tale wherein is set down a record of the strange and exceptional adventures of Blaise de Breault and Martin Belcastel in the New World, as members of expeditions sent out by the great Coligny

BY

C. M. SUBLETTE

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY
FRANK M. RINES

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This book is dedicated
to the memory of
my daughter
Mary Catherine
for whom I wrote it

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BOOK ONE

SWORDS AND BLUE WATER

I

I ACHIEVE A NOM DE GUERRE

Before I left the Sword of the Brave Chevalier that bright February morning I inquired of my host the shortest route to the hôtel of Admiral de Coligny, and received such a number of directions from that worthy that I had not gone far until I was at a loss how to proceed. But I inquired as I went along, and hoped that I would, in time, arrive at my destination.

I was from Gascony but a few days; and after the little Gascon towns the rush and bustle of Paris, the turnings and twistings of the myriad lanes and streets, the crowds of people intent upon their concerns, awed and interested me at the same time. The death of my father a month before had saddened me inexpressibly, and left me alone, — the last of our poor but ancient house, — with nothing but my sword and the little estate of Breault.

I could see my father's keen face, haggard with suffering from the old wounds that had brought him home from the wars, as we rode or walked over the rolling hills of my native land, while he instructed me in the rules of war and in the niceties of conduct expected from a man of gentle birth. I thought him the finest gentleman in France, and missed him more and more each day; for I had been brought up alone at

Breault (except for old Bartelmy, my father's servant) until my father's return some three years before, and had neither kith nor kin, friend nor foe in the whole wide world. That was the burden of my thought as I walked along; but I was soon to learn differently.

It was at a parting of the street that I met the fat man with the black patch over his left eye. I asked him civilly to direct me to the hôtel de Coligny.

He did not answer at once, but let his single eye travel in a leisurely fashion from the black cock's feather in my cap down my new suit of bright-scarlet serge to my good leather shoes of the same hue. He stared pointedly at the curiously wrought hilt of my father's sword, which hung comfortably against my thigh. When he looked up there was a faint gleam of irony in his small black eye and the almost imperceptible glimmer of a smile about his thick lips. He bowed low — too low, I thought.

"If his Excellency will but deign to turn a half-wheel," he said, "I shall be honored to point out to him the house in question."

I glanced at him sharply, suspicious of this exaggerated courtesy, but there was nothing at which I could conveniently take offense. He spoke in a smooth and oily voice; his huge body, in faded blue clothes, drooped in a deprecatory way; evidently he desired to please, yet he was repellent because of a native insincerity. I turned half about, impatiently.

"The house of gray stone," he went on, after another quick glance at me from his one restless eye, "where

the groom holds the saddled horse, is the house of Admiral de Coligny, who is so soon to be honored by a visit from Monsieur de Breault."

I spun about, startled at his use of my name, just in time to catch a glimpse of his broad back and womanish, slanting shoulders vanishing nimbly around the corner. For all his immense weight he moved with a catlike, soft-footed ease that was astounding! I stood gaping at the spot where he had disappeared.

I wondered, as I walked down the street, how that fat fellow had come by my name, for I was certain that I had never seen him before; but by the time I had climbed the steps of the stone house I had dismissed the matter from my mind. The spacious main hall of the house was filled with a motley gathering: courtiers, splendidly dressed, strolled about arm in arm, or conversed in groups; a few provincials clung forlornly to the walls, easily picked out by their uneasy air in the brilliant assemblage. Here and there were a few restless, arrogant gentlemen in weather-faded doublets, moving among the throng, insolently impatient, fierce-eyed, grizzled, flat-bellied, with long swords tapping their lean calves — hungry war-dogs, forever growling. France was full of them. A few lackeys made their way about and one of these, the doorkeeper, seeing me near the doorway, came and requested to know my business. I told him that I desired to see Admiral de Coligny.

"Monsieur perhaps has an engagement?" he asked. "Monseigneur sees only those who have an appointment." I shook my head.

"Nevertheless," I replied, "I believe that if you will say to him that Blaise de Breault of Gascony craves the honor of an audience, he will grant it."

At my announcement of my name, a gentleman who stood a few feet away to my right turned around and looked at me intently. The servant, having signified that I was to wait, left me and vanished up the broad staircase at one side of the room. The gentleman, who had been observing me so closely, now approached and saluted me. He was a tall, spare man dressed in black, with a long sword in a battered leather scabbard by his side. The gravity of his countenance was relieved by sparkling steel-gray eyes, oddly brilliant in his dark face.

"Are you, by any chance, related to Gervaise de Breault, who fought through the Italian wars with the Admiral?" he inquired courteously, in a deep, pleasant voice.

"His son, monsieur," I replied.

His sober countenance broke at once into a frank and charming smile. "Then mayhap you will have heard of me," he said, "I am Martin Belcastel. Your father — "

"Ah, yes, monsieur," I cried, "my father recommended, on his death-bed, that I should seek you out. His best friend, he called you, and the best swordsman in France!"

"So my old comrade is dead. I am sorry for that. He was a brave man — a hard smiter with the sword, and the best companion a man ever had." He sighed. "Where are you lodging, young Blaise?"

I told him at the Sword of the Brave Chevalier in the rue de Bussy.

"I sup there many evenings," said Belcastel. "They have a fine Spanish wine and make a good meat-pasty after the English style. Let us meet there to-night, when we can talk without interruption. Mayhap I can be of service to you."

I thanked him for his offer of service, and he moved away to join a short, heavy, bearded man who had the roll of the sea in all his movements.

The servant came at that moment and informed me that Monseigneur had begged to be excused for that morning, as he was engaged with Monsieur Ribault, who was to leave Paris in the afternoon; but he had appointed a time to receive me on the second morning thereafter, at ten o'clock. His master, he added, had asked him to assure me of his regret that our meeting must be postponed, even for so short a time, as he remembered my father very well and entertained for him only the kindliest feeling. I promised to attend upon Admiral de Coligny at the time named and turned to make my way out, little thinking I had made a promise that I was destined never to fulfill.

As I passed among the groups of men in the room, I heard the name Ribault pronounced again and saw the dark, bearded man — Belcastel's acquaintance — whom I had taken for a man of the sea, following a servant up the broad stair. Then I recalled having heard that Jean Ribault was the master mariner who was to sail the following week with the Huguenot colony for the New World.

I spent the rest of the day in seeing the city; and the queer sights, the ways of a city, to which I was unaccustomed, the great size of it, so astonished and filled my eager eyes that it was dark when I arrived once more at the auberge in the rue de Bussy.

The common room was well filled, and there was a steady buzz of conversation as I entered. At a long table in the centre of the room sat three men with their heads together, talking in low voices. Menials were busy serving the company. At small tables about the walls sat others of varying degree, and at one of these I saw Martin Belcastel, comfortably disposed upon a bench with his back against the wall. There I joined him and we fell into conversation; but as we talked I noticed that Monsieur Belcastel's gray eyes, cold and piercing now, were fixed intently upon the group of three who sat in the centre of the room. And after a little I noticed that there were those about at other tables who laughed at the remarks — inaudible to us — of these three men, while still others cast dark and frowning looks in their direction. Just then a new figure came upon the scene, and I saw, to my surprise, that it was the same fat man whom I had accosted in the morning. He crossed the room with that quick and easy stride which had so astounded me earlier in the day, and I could swear he made some remark in a low voice to the men at the central table, as he passed them and continued on his way to the kitchen. I half started to my feet, with the intention of demanding of him how he came by my name; but ere I could do so he had disappeared through a door at the

rear. I sank back into my seat, wondering idly who he might be.

"Gervaise's illness and death explain why I had heard nothing of him for so long," Monsieur Belcastel's voice broke in upon my thoughts. "I had thought often of seeking him out; but I have an affair on my hands that must be concluded before I do anything else. The honor of my house demands it." His eyes hardened in their steady regard of the men he was watching. "Tell me, Master Blaise, how your father died."

I told him; described to him the three happy years we had spent together after my father's return from the wars, the gradual decline of his powers, my fears for him.

"In the last month of his life, monsieur," I concluded, "he was much alone, strolling about in little-frequented parts of Breault, looking his last upon it. I am sure that he knew death was close, for I found him in the middle of the night, on one occasion, standing in the armory door, fully dressed, with a candle in his hand. He was staring at the helmet of Jean de Breault, the founder of our house, which hangs over the door. I came upon him unawares and ere he saw me I heard him say, 'That will do, I think.' He wandered a bit, I fear — "

At this moment I was interrupted by one of the three in the middle of the room breaking suddenly into loud speech. He was a strongly built man of forty, with hard eyes and a dark beard, cut square.

"Nom d'un nom!" he bawled. "What is all this talk

of ways and means? I hear nothing but clacking tongues in dark corners! Mordieu! We have swords by our sides, eh, messieurs? It's simple enough, it seems to me. Let us exterminate these damned stiff-necked heretics and have done with it. The scum of France, from Condé and Coligny to the meanest — "

I rose to my feet and laid hand on sword, but Martin Belcastel was before me. He sprang up swiftly and appeared in two strides at the table where Spadebeard sat with his two companions. They got quickly upon their feet.

"If monsieur," Belcastel began in a mild voice, "will but cease his bull's bellowing, I will be pleased to have him name a time and a place where he can begin the extermination which he suggests — "

"And monsieur is — ?" asked Spadebeard with hauteur.

"Martin Belcastel, at your service, Monsieur de Tavannes."

There was an instant silence in the room. Spadebeard's flushed face paled perceptibly and he fell back a step; but in an instant he recovered himself.

"No Tavannes ever refused such a task, sir," he cried, drawing himself up to his full height. "The time is to-morrow at dawn, and the place" — he hesitated as though in thought — "that little walled park at the end of this street. Monsieur perhaps knows of it?"

"Ay, I know it well," Belcastel answered evenly, "I have chastised François de Guise's bullies there often, before this. It is quiet: we shall not be interrupted. At dawn to-morrow then, monsieur."

"At dawn, sir, I will be at your service," Tavannes assured him. His voice was steady enough, but his eyes had an uneasy look in them, as though he was trapped and knew not the way out. Belcastel turned to resume his seat in the corner.

"And you, sir?" I asked of the tall man who stood at Spadebeard's shoulder. "Are you, by any good chance, of the same mind as your friend? If so, it would give me great pleasure to teach you a little respect for the 'stiff-necks.' At the same time and place, monsieur?"

He took a step forward and glared at me in astonished rage. "Why — you damned upstart — I will slit your gullet for you! I — " he choked with rage. A long scar on his jaw showed an ugly white against his flushed face.

Behind me I heard a low chuckle, and I turned to see the bulky body of the mysterious stranger with the black patch over his eye. He smiled ironically and bowed to me, but I turned back to face my unknown enemy across the table. At this point the third of Spadebeard's party sprang up. He was a man of thirty, boldly handsome, with cold blue eyes and a honey-colored beard.

"Let me have him, Louis," he cried, "I have a desire to clip the spurs of this scarlet cockerel."

"Nay, Henri — " The tall man turned to me. "You will pardon me while I settle this matter with my friend?"

"Nay, gentlemen, I am not to be pawed over in this fashion," I cried hotly. "This gentleman first," — I

indicated the man with the scar, — "then you, monsieur! The little park mentioned by Monsieur Belcastel, at dawn. Is that satisfactory, messieurs?"

So it was finally agreed. We exchanged names. Scarface, it appeared, was Louis de Marsay; the younger man was Henri de Tanqueray.

Martin Belcastel and I retired to our place near the wall; our enemies left the auberge. There was a quizzical look in Martin's eyes as he regarded me across the board; then his tranquil features broke into a smile, and that smile grew into a suppressed laugh.

"It seems," he remarked a little later, "that young De Tanqueray was apt, my dear Blaise, in his description of you, eh? The 'scarlet cockerel' — very droll, is it not?"

"In what way, Monsieur Belcastel?" I asked stiffly. It seemed to me that there was a slight hint of mockery in his tone.

"A cockerel, my boy, it is well known, is not famous for good judgment. It seems that he has a desire to fight the whole barnyard, as you wish to fight the whole world. Well — parbleu! I might have expected it. You are cut off the old pattern. Your father never allowed anyone to exceed him on the field of honor." His kind reference to my father robbed his words of all sting.

A servant came and spread our meal before us and we fell to without words. As I ate, there popped, unbidden, into my mind the image of the fat man with the black patch over his eye. I looked about the room, but he was not to be seen. He had mysteriously

impressed me as an acute and sardonic intelligence, buried in a flabby mass of flesh.

After we had done, Martin Belcastel began to talk pleasantly of the adventure set for the morning, and told me some of the history of the three men we were to meet. Guise's bravos, all of them, he described them as desperate and dangerous men. De Tanqueray in particular, he said, was a favorite of François de Guise; to kill him would be a misfortune, for it would mean a knife in the back some dark night. He inquired after my experience at swordplay, and when I told him that my father had taught me what I knew, he seemed pleased. Later he left the inn, promising to call for me in the morning in ample time to fill the engagement.

II

SWORDPLAY

The cold gray light of approaching dawn lighted my chamber as I dressed. The auberge was silent, gripped in sleep, except for a variety of subdued sounds from the direction of the kitchen. I tucked sword and dagger under my arm, and slipped down the stairs into the street with the least possible noise. The air was brisk, and a hoary mantle of frost lay over everything, so that I was obliged after a few moments to pace the footway smartly to keep warm. In a short time I saw Martin Belcastel's active figure coming down the rue de Bussy, with his sword beneath his arm. My heart leaped when I saw him, for a winter dawn is the most cheerless time imaginable; and when I saw his unhurried gait, as of one on his common business, his vigorous face calmly sanguine, my spirits revived and I answered his cheerful greeting in kind.

As we went on together down the rue de Bussy at an easy walk, arm in arm, past the blank faces of the houses in the ever-growing light of the morning, there sprang within me an exultation at the hazard before me and the comradeship of the cool and collected man at my side. Belcastel remarked that this was like to be a perilous matter before we had done with it. These men, he wanted me to know, were not such as I would understand, being without experience of their

kind, coming as I did from a good house, son of a father who was the soul of honor. We might have to do with something unforeseen, — he pointed out, — and it behooved us to keep our eyes about us, since these bullies of Guise considered it a virtue to slay a Protestant by any means, fair or foul.

By this time we had reached the small park: in summer an emerald set in the grime of the city, now dead and lifeless in its winter garb. We made our way through dense shrubbery, bare of leaves, to the little sward in the centre of the enclosure. The place was empty. As we waited, Martin Belcastel spent his time poking about in the dry bushes which grew thickly all about the central space.

In a few minutes our three worthies appeared on the path from the gate. They bowed, but said no word. Spadebeard and De Marsay began at once to remove their doublets. Martin and I contented ourselves with turning back our cuffs; we retained our doublets by instinct, I believe. The light by this time was perfect for our purpose, but the short dead grass, covered heavily with frost, made but a slippery footing. De Marsay looked doubtfully at it and shook his head. Stripped of his doublet he looked far less formidable than before: the long scar on his bony jaw was less noticeable, and his body was more slender than I had expected. Spadebeard, however, when he stood forth with sword and dagger, was a truly magnificent man. His corded forearms seemed as powerful as though made of steel; his broad chest was grandly arched and covered with a mat of coarse black hair;

above, his fierce eyes glowed vividly from under their scowling brows.

I drew sword and dagger and waited.

"Shall I give the word, messieurs?" asked Martin Belcastel, as calmly as if on parade. I was shaking with impatience to be at the business.

Spadebeard nodded; and there came on his face such a false and derisive smile as I never beheld before. I advanced a step to face De Marsay.

"En garde, messieurs!" Belcastel's voice snapped incisively in the still air.

Instantly there was the sharp ring of steel on steel, a sibilant clash as the blades met and parted, the stamp and shuffle of moving feet. De Marsay's eyes blazed as he attacked savagely; it was evident that my presumption of the night before rankled in his mind and he meant to make short work of me. Cut, parry, thrust, parry — click! click! — and thrust again. We circled, advanced, retreated; parried hilt to hilt. I played cautiously on that slippery ground, feeling out his wrist, hoping to find a weakness; but for a long time I felt nothing. The man was as strong as a bull, and careful! But at last his failure to find an opening or gain the advantage enraged him so that he threw prudence to the wind, and came at me like a tiger. I was hard-pushed to defend myself from a bewildering number of cuts and lunges, delivered with great speed; but his fury soon began to tell upon him; sweat ran from him in streams and he took his breath in short hard gasps. I reflected that now, without doubt, was the time to press him.

Somewhere to my rear I hear Belcastel's voice, as tranquil as ever apparently: "And now, sir, prepare to die. I shall kill you, as you killed my brother two years ago. You have but a moment to live, monsieur!" And then: "Through the throat, sir — You have it, you dog!"

"Mon Dieu! You've — " The words were broken off short by a horrible gurgling sob.

At that moment my foot slipped on the unstable footing and I went to one knee. De Marsay's blade slipped over mine and I felt a sudden keen burning in my left shoulder. A wolfish grin spread over my opponent's face. I thrust desperately upward under his guard and passed my sword through his shoulder. The smile faded from his face and he fell backward, cursing through clenched teeth.

Just then I heard a harsh voice shouting, "À moi, mes braves! À moi!"

Off to my left I saw De Tanqueray, sword in hand, charging down upon me like a mad bull, his pale eyes flaming with hatred. Back of him, the top of the high wall seemed alive with men, dark against the sky.

"Treachery! To the gate, boy!" called Martin Belcastel. But even as he spoke De Tanqueray was upon me.

He cut viciously at me. I avoided it and thrust in return. He parried — a close thing — and thrust violently. Ere he could recover I ran him through the belly, snatched cap and sword belt from the ground, and raced for the gate. Behind me I could hear the

pelt of pursuing feet on the frozen turf; before me I could see Martin Belcastel's shoulders swaying as he ran.

At the gate I almost collided with a large man in a black cloak, whose face was shaded under a great black hat. He stepped nimbly aside, but as I passed him I seemed to catch the ironic flash of a single eye gleaming from his shadowed face. I experienced a thrill of foreboding, as of some unknown peril.

But I had no time for thought. Ma foi! How we ran! Martin slowed his pace until I overhauled him. "Follow me," he cried, then, and set off at a great rate, so that I had hard work to stay even with him. We passed the Sword of the Brave Chevalier at a tearing run, almost overturning the sleepy porter who was scouring the steps. As we ran, the first golden rays of the morning sun fell in long yellow streamers between the houses and across the narrow street. Behind us the pursuit gave tongue.

Without a word Belcastel turned off to the right down a narrow lane between two tall houses, and a minute later we were zigzagging through a maze of narrow alleys, foul with decaying refuse, until at last Martin Belcastel halted before a little wooden door, studded with large iron nails and held with a huge lock wrought from iron. This yielded to a key, produced from under his doublet, and gave into a small garden behind a high house. Far away we could hear the voices of our pursuers calling to each other in the labyrinth of alleys and lanes in which we had lost them.

"Peste!" observed Martin ruefully, as he regarded our shoes and hose splattered with the ill-smelling mire through which we had come. "We smell to the heavens!" Then he listened to the shouts of our enemies who were drawing slowly nearer. "Canaille! They will rouse the whole neighborhood. Come — we had best be out of sight."

We entered the door at the rear of the house, went along a short gloomy corridor and up a staircase into another hall. Here Martin opened a door and we passed together into a large, well-furnished apartment, where a lackey with cropped hair was kneeling on the floor cleaning a pair of boots. The pale winter sunlight streamed through high windows hung with faded red draperies. There were several large, worn chairs, a bed fashioned for giants, a massive table of richly carved wood; through an open door I could see a corner of a dressing-room with a small bed in it.

"Such is my establishment, Blaise," said Martin, with one of his rare smiles. "It suffices for my modest needs. But sit down, my lad, and — mordieu! You are pale. Strip off his doublet, Nicolas," he said to his servant, who had risen and was standing respectfully at one side.

I sat down in the chair Nicolas placed for me. I was beginning to feel weak, now that the excitement was over. The long run had set my shoulder bleeding faster. When my doublet and shirt were off, Belcastel examined the wound, remarking in his dry way that it was too bad, but it was just a scratch, as he had thought, and it was to be feared that I would have

no scar to show for the morning's work. I regretted this exceedingly.

"And a good piece of work it was," he went on, after he had bound up my shoulder and put Nicolas to cleaning our clothes. He put a robe de chambre about my shoulders as he spoke.

"A little warm, monsieur, that last minute or two," I remarked.

"Nay, Blaise, no 'monsieurs' between comrades who have drawn sword together. Call me Martin. After all, I am only double your age. You have gained much honor this morning and you have a pretty trick of swordplay for one so young. De Marsay is one of the cleverest duelists in Paris. He is not a bad man — I have no great wish to see him die."

"But Spadebeard, Martin? Tavannes, I mean — "

His face hardened. "Ah, Tavannes! He treacherously slew my brother, and I had hunted him without success for over two years until last night. If there is any justice after death, his soul will fry in the hottest part of hell! Two years — well, at last I am free to follow my inclinations. But I will not conceal from you, Blaise, that we are in a perilous predicament. We have killed two of the henchmen of François le Balafré; and le Duc de Guise is a good master. He will revenge them — if he can. There'll be no hue and cry over this affair — a dagger in the back some dark night or, mayhap, your life rotted out in a filthy dungeon. Parbleu! I'd prefer the dagger."

"They can't frighten me," I began warmly; but Martin Belcastel smiled dryly, and I broke off.

"Blaise! Blaise! You have no call to affirm your courage to me. But we are reasonable as well as brave, are we not? Why run our poor heads into the lion's mouth needlessly? Let us disappear, eh? For a few months. Everything might change and François de Guise be supping with his master, the Devil, when we return."

"But, Martin," I objected, "in France men who are wanted by powerful persons do not disappear so easily. They are found and punished. A lion has a long paw."

"That is correct, Blaise. In France we would never have a breathing spell; and once in the hands of François de Guise we should be crushed and thrown aside like the toys we are. We are no match for him. It is not sharp swords will save us now, but keen brains. Prudence is much esteemed among the wise. Let us leave France then, let us disappear — into the ocean."

"Eh?" I said, doubtfully. "Here's an idea! You mean — "

"Just this: my old friend Jean Ribault — you may have seen him yesterday at the Hôtel de Coligny — "

"Ah, yes, the dark, seafaring gentleman — " I murmured.

"Exactly. In three days' time he sails from Le Havre for the New World with three galiots. He is taking a number of artisans, a few soldiers, a few farmers to till the soil, and a few noblemen, all Huguenots, who go for the adventure to be had. This is Coligny's plan — to make a home for the persecuted

faith in the wilderness, and to claim the land in the name of His Majesty, Charles the Ninth. After landing the colony, he will return to France for further supplies, with which he will sail back to the New World. By the time we reach France again we shall have been gone a year, and have seen many strange and wonderful things in that savage country; best of all, we shall have been forgotten by the Scarred One. Not a bad plan, eh?"

"Not so bad," I answered, "but impossible of execution, since we are not invited to go upon this voyage." No doubt my voice was heavy with irony.

Martin Belcastel laughed outright. "Well, Blaise, that's a fair hit! I forgot to tell you Ribault has made me offers of service and solicited me to accompany him. I am sure that I can arrange it for both of us. Leave that to me. What say you? Will you go?"

I did not reply at once. I remembered that I had nothing to hold me in France: my little estate at Breault could get along very well without me and I had no kin upon this earth. I was possibly the last of our old, not undistinguished, house. To die by an assassin's dagger was no part of my plans, and this voyage offered a new and unusual experience. In my mind it suddenly assumed the lustre of a great and fascinating hazard.

I got up quickly from my chair. "You are right, Martin," I cried, "this looks like an interesting adventure you propose. I will go, by all means!"

III

THE TRINITY

After that declaration, Martin Belcastel embraced me gravely and called Nicolas to bring wine. We drank to our good fortune, "which it is bound to be," Belcastel remarked thoughtfully, "for we were both born under a lucky star, else we should not be here now." He lounged at ease in one of the large chairs, meditating no doubt upon the best way to accomplish our ends.

"We must ride to-night," he said, after a considerable silence. "I will send Nicolas to pay your account and fetch your things from the auberge. You must give him a note to the host, and perhaps it would be best to acquaint him also with a list of your possessions, so that he may be sure of getting everything."

These things being done, and Nicolas despatched after my horse from the inn stables and my portmanteau which contained my few belongings, we continued our conversation.

Monsieur Ribault, Martin assured me, would be at the inn of the Grand Mariner in Le Havre on the second night after this one, and would sail the next morning when the tide made some three hours after sunrise. It would be best, he thought, to ride twenty leagues of the thirty-five to Le Havre to-night. This would allow us to sleep during the day at a lonely inn

near St. Pierre, and the second night's ride would put us in Le Havre in the early morning. A day's sleep and an interview with monsieur the seafaring gentleman that night would set everything right, Martin was sure. "If not, well, best cross that — "

The return of Nicolas, bearing my portmanteau, cut short Belcastel's remarks. Nicolas, it appeared, was big with news. Upon his arrival at the inn he had sought out the landlord for the purpose of settling my account, which transaction being accomplished to the satisfaction of both, the host had accompanied Nicolas to my chamber, where they found my possessions scattered about the room in a most disorderly way. This being the opposite of what I had led him to expect, Nicolas observed, he had required of the master of the house an explanation. That worthy had been genuinely perplexed by the state of affairs — Nicolas was certain of that. They had repacked the portmanteau, making an inventory at the same time, the host meanwhile bewailing with great volubility the misfortune that this occurrence should hurt the good name of his house.

The chamber-woman, however, remembered that a large man in a black cloak and of a great obesity, — Nicolas illustrated with outstretched hands, — blind in one eye, it is to be supposed, since he had a black patch over it, had knocked loudly on the young monsieur's door shortly after sunrise. Doubtless a friend of the young —

"Diable!" I burst out. "This passes my patience. A very impertinent and mysterious person, this fat

fellow!" I told Belcastel rapidly of my meetings with him, but he could make nothing of it and was as mystified as I. At any rate, he commented, it was a problem we could not solve at present, as we were leaving Paris that night.

Nothing had been taken, Nicolas reported in his flat sing-song voice; Monsieur de Breault's horse he had led in a roundabout way to stable with his master's. Two swaggering men with mean faces had inquired for Monsieur de Breault as Nicolas was leaving the auberge, but had gone off down the rue de Bussy as soon as they discovered that monsieur was not at the inn. Evidently two of the pursuing party of the morning, — this was Nicolas' idea, — one of whom remarked surlily to the other that the bird had flown and it was useless to look further. A remark very much to the point, inasmuch as, like a bird in air, I had left no trace.

During the remainder of the day my mind dwelt much upon that strange interest the unknown took in my affairs. What his motive was I was unable to fathom, but the mocking irony of his manner angered me, and I intended to have an explanation at the first opportunity.

Martin Belcastel spent most of the day setting his affairs in shape for the long absence.

He wrote two letters, a laborious task which amused me much, for Martin gripped the light quill like a drowning man and chewed hard upon his lower lip: his sinewy hand was better fitted to the sword than the pen. After a light noon meal prepared by the

admirable Nicolas, having nothing better to do, I drew my chair up beside one of the tall narrow windows which gave a view of a series of small gardens, through which passed butcher boys, grocers' boys from the rue des Lombards, grooms, lackeys, and a number of other persons, all hurrying, each intent upon his own particular business.

This was but indifferent entertainment, so, after a while, I lay back in my chair and gazed at the thin strip of sky visible over the housetops. The sun had long since vanished behind gray clouds and the dull heavens had the gloomy appearance of approaching night. And thus I sat, drowsily impatient of the slow dragging hours, until I was aroused by the murmur of voices somewhere near. I sat up suddenly and glanced out the window at the garden next door. Two ladies were strolling slowly back and forth on the stone-flagged walk that ran from end to end of the small inclosure. One, comfortably plump, was without doubt a duenna or a maid to the other.

But that other! Oh, how ardently I wished myself in that garden! How I hated the events of the morning which forced me to skulk in hiding! She was wrapped in a long blue cloak, from under which her little feet twinkled as she walked. She seemed pensive, and spoke but little, while her companion chattered volubly, without rest. It must have been the intensity of my gaze which caused her to raise her proud head and cast a glance toward the window where I sat, craning my neck like a great booby who had never seen a woman before. In truth, I had

never seen one like this: the Gascon damoiselles could not compare with her. Our eyes met for an instant and a thrill penetrated to my very marrow. Whatever she saw in my eyes must have amused her, for she smiled faintly. A short time afterward they returned to the house. As she went up the steps she turned slightly and looked again at my window. For an instant I could see clearly her sweet and lovely face, set regally on a slender round neck, gleaming against the gray stone behind her, then she vanished through the door. In that very second I lost my heart — which organ a Gascon wears very near his doublet.

When I glanced in the direction of the table where Martin toiled at his writing, I found him regarding me thoughtfully, and I asked him — in a somewhat timid voice, for I feared that he might banter me — who inhabited the house next door.

"That is the house of Monsieur le Comte de la Costa," he answered, with a mild light of raillery in his eyes. Then he went on without pause, "and the young lady is his niece, the damoiselle Marie de la Costa."

"She is very beautiful," was all I could think to say, so confused was I by his penetrating to the reason for my inquiry.

Martin Belcastel chuckled. "So think a number of the other young men," he replied. "She is quite the fashion in Paris, I am told, but no man has gained any advantage with her, unless it be young Roger de Merrillac, whose estates lie next to her father's. It is reported that she will not marry, save where she loves.

The La Costas are a rich and powerful family. Cast not your eyes in that direction, mon cher Blaise, for it will lead only to disappointment."

"I am not likely to cast them in any direction for some time to come," I remarked sulkily, "unless it be on some barbarian maiden in this New World."

"Oh, as to that, do not despair, for the Sieur de la Costa, the young lady's father, is one of the leaders of our faith, and has announced his intention of establishing himself in the New World as soon as the colony is successfully located. I had the information of his brother, Monsieur le Comte, whom I have known these many years. So you may yet have an opportunity to try your luck in that direction, if it so please you."

With that Martin returned once more to his writing, and I to my reflections.

As I lay back in my chair, the day seemed suddenly more gloomy than before, and in my heart I cursed heartily the adventure to which I had pledged myself. I had no desire to see this New World — a barren and profitless place most likely; I wished, rather, to stay in France; and I spent the balance of the day in a haze of conflicting and melancholy thought.

As soon as darkness had fallen we took the road, Martin Belcastel and I riding side by side, with Nicolas a horse's length in the rear. We rode in silence, at a foot pace, through the streets of the city, making innumerable turns and twistings in the tortuous lanes and byways. The sky was overcast, the darkness impenetrable, and I marveled at the surety with which

my companion angled among the intricate windings of the narrow streets. To an observer we must have presented the appearance of conspirators, escaping after some evil deed; muffled against the cold in heavy cloaks, with hats pulled low over our foreheads, we had indeed a secret and guilty air.

When we had passed through the straggling environs of the city and turned into the broad highway to the west a cold drizzling rain added to our discomfort. I thought much upon the girl in the garden, and lapsed finally into a grouty impatience with my companion, the New World, the voyage — in fact, with life as a whole. So we rode through the night to the tune of creaking saddle-leather, jingling accoutrements, the moaning of the wind through bare branches of tall trees which flanked the road, to pull up, in the gray of a chill dawn, before the shuttered, blank face of a lonely, nameless inn, an arrow's flight off the road. After some trouble we succeeded in awakening a disgruntled host, of singularly unprepossessing aspect, who in surly silence made us comfortable. Preparing for bed, I remembered that this was the morning of my interview with Admiral de Coligny, which must be postponed for some time.

I awoke to find Martin Belcastel shaking me and talking in his grave way. "A clear conscience, eh? You lie there like one of the Seven Sleepers, Blaise, or old Barbarossa. 'Tis sunset and a clear evening. Time to get up!"

When I had gotten fully awake I found that Nicolas had, with his usual foresight, dried my sodden

clothing and cleaned my boots. The master of the house served us a most appetizing meal and we took to our saddles in good spirits, an hour after nightfall. In the starlit night we pursued our way steadily, without incident, and dawn found us entering Le Havre. The road led along the river, and I was engaged in craning forward in the saddle for my first sight of the sea when the rays of the rising sun struck down upon the broad estuary of the Seine.

It glittered brightly on the crests of the waves, and was flung back in luminous, golden gleams from the lofty and castellated poop of a majestic and stately galiot that rode at her moorings in the harbor. Her stern was splendidly gilded, and the numerous windows and portholes gave me the impression of a castle built upon the water. Beyond her were two smaller vessels, and beside them the galiot appeared gigantic. I remarked as much to Martin Belcastel, only to meet with the dry reply that she was only of one hundred and fifty tons burden. "That is the Trinity," Martin added, "Monsieur Ribault's flagship."

This of course renewed my interest, and when the steady jog of the horses had brought us abreast of her I made out further details: the low waist, the high foredeck, and the diminutive, battlemented forecastle perched precariously on her stem. I thought her a glorious ship, in spite of Martin's contemptuous disparagement, and watched her until we turned away from the port into the crooked streets of the town.

IV

VOYAGERS INTO THE UNKNOWN

That night, at the Inn of the Grand Mariner, we had speech of Monsieur Jean Ribault, and arrangements were made just as Martin Belcastel had predicted. Captain Ribault I found, upon acquaintance, to be a downright and outspoken man of a fearless and open countenance. He welcomed me the more, he assured me, for the reason that several had failed him; and he might have need of good swords, which the son of my father — whom he had known — was bound to be. He made me his compliments upon my conduct in the matter of the duel, of which Martin had told him. I thanked him and he left the inn, warning us to meet the ship's boat soon after sunrise the next day.

We were afoot early in the morning, which gave promise for a fair day. Nicolas came to take his last orders from his master shortly before we walked down to the port. His eyes were clouded, but otherwise his stolid face was as usual. Martin spoke to him familiarly, and bestowed a liberal gift of gold upon him. In a year's time he might look for us back, Belcastel told him, unless perhaps we were killed in this wilderness to which we were going. "Oh, Monsieur Martin, that could never be!" said Nicolas in his flat voice, evincing thus his simple faith in his master's powers

— a remark which so affected Martin that, in order to cover up his emotion, he observed in a matter-of-fact tone that everything was at the discretion of le bon Dieu. Nicolas rode off down the street with our horses, and as we watched him out of sight, it seemed to me that our last link with the old life was gone. We were masterless wanderers about the world.

"I shall miss him," Martin's voice broke in on my thoughts. "During twenty years he has been entirely devoted to me."

At the jetty we found a boat from the galiot awaiting us and were soon at the vessel's side. At the top of the ladder, in the low waist, we found Captain Ribault, who received us kindly and assigned us a cabin in the stern of the ship. Upon our return to the deck he made us known to the ship's company, including those gentlemen who had volunteered to accompany the expedition. Among these was René de Laudonnière, a well-made man of ruddy complexion, who was likewise a skilled and resourceful navigator: later he was to play a brave part in the New World. Here also was the Chevalier de Jonville, a conceited and foppish young man a few years my senior, who was always found where new and desperate perils abounded. He had haughty manners, an effeminate face, and hot, fierce brown eyes. Dashing and courageous swordsman though he was, I never liked him, because of his overbearing deportment. Besides these were Messieurs d'Ully, of middle age and without enthusiasm; de Beaudiarre, a gruff, hard-visaged, old war-dog of King Francis'

times; de Lagrange, a babbler and untrustworthy. Lastly there was Captain Albert de la Pierra, a soldierly man, forty years of age, of unquestionable character, but severe and inflexible, which latter trait was destined to cost him dearly.

It was while Belcastel and I stood in the waist of the ship, near the tall mainmast, chatting with these gentlemen, that my astonished eye picked out of a group forward a huge, shapeless figure, clad in faded blue clothes. As his lone eye caught mine fixed upon him, he bowed very low indeed.

I walked straight across the deck toward him.

"Sir," I said sarcastically, when I had arrived within speaking distance, "since you are pleased to take a ceremonious air with me, I desire to know why you have in the last four days inserted yourself into my affairs on four different occasions. How came you by my name?"

"Oh, monsieur, you have mistaken me, I fear," he said, with a shrug, as of one who is hurt by an unjust suspicion; but the persistent gleam of irony in his eye belied his sincerity. "As to monsieur's name," he went on smoothly, "I recognized him at once. Parole d'honneur, monsieur, you are the exact image of your illustrious father — a most brave and able captain, sir — under whom I had the honor to serve in the army of le Duc d'Enghien. Your father was much beloved by the men of his company, monsieur, and that was my reason for wishing to see you, sir: to get news of my old commander, who was so much admired by all of us. Is it not so, Pierre?"

He appealed for confirmation to an extremely tall man, excessively thin, with beady, black eyes and a bony, cadaverous face.

"I'll not say nay to that," said this thin one. He swore a resounding Italian oath. "Corpo di Bacco! We made some glorious campaigns under our worthy captain, eh, Michel? A gallant man, monsieur!"

"My brother, sir," the fat man said, waving his hand toward the last speaker, "who also had the honor to serve under your father. And à propos, may I inquire after the health of your parent, whom I esteem so very much?"

This word civility exasperated me by its very insincerity, for it seemed to me that the cloud of words was but a means to conceal some deeper and more sinister interest than the one implied; but I reflected that it would be best to ascertain, if possible, the real nature of that interest. So I spoke them fair.

"And your name, sir?" I asked.

"I am Michel Barre, Monsieur de Breault, an old soldier, sir, who hopes that he may be numbered among those who enjoy your patronage — for the sake of your renowned father." All this was said in a most bland and oily way, and the good feeling expressed was given the lie by the mocking irony of his single black eye.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Martin Belcastel approaching, so I throttled an inclination to cuff the ears of this corpulent mocker and told him that my father was dead a month gone. He expressed his sorrow at this calamity and made me offers of

service for which I thanked him, and, Belcastel coming up at that minute, I took his arm and we returned to the group of gentlemen in the waist of the galiot.

While I had been engaged with the mysterious Barre, preparations for sailing had been going forward rapidly, both on the Trinity and the two smaller caravels that lay an arrow-flight away. The deck presented a scene of great bustle and commotion. Two sailors stood ready by the great lever or tiller by which the ship was steered, and forward there was a loud rattling of chains and blocks as the anchor was raised. At last the great sails were shaken out, and, as they bellied and filled with the wind from the shore, Captain Ribault caused one of the brass culverins on the raised foredeck to be fired, as a signal to all of our departure. This was answered by guns on several ships that lay in the harbor. Our two sister ships fell into place on each side of us. At the foremast flew the pennon of the Admiral de Coligny, while at the main the flag of His Majesty Charles the Ninth waved bravely in the wind. So we set sail, pointed the bows of our ships into the obscure and misty wastes of the Atlantic, voyaged cheerfully into the unknown.

You may be sure that all this bustle and the method of getting sail on a ship engaged my attention, landsman as I was, provoked in me a lively interest, so that it was not until the call went out for the noon meal that I retired from the deck. The sea breeze had sharpened my appetite and I ate heartily, in company

with Martin Belcastel and the other gentlemen I have mentioned. From time to time I noticed Martin Belcastel watching me with a queer twinkle in his thoughtful eyes, an almost imperceptible smile on his grave face; but I thought nothing of it. Three hours later, when we met the long, rolling waves of the sea itself, I felt that I should never care for food again. I understood then the bantering look on Martin's countenance. For two days I felt that each hour was to be my last; but on the third I was better, and I had never any return of ship's sickness.

For a fortnight we had fair weather with favorable winds, and made good progress. I related to Martin my conversation with Michel Barre and he made me his compliments upon my foresight in speaking civilly to them, "for if you had angered them," he observed, "we would learn nothing and might sometime be taken unawares.

"But as it is," he continued jestingly, "they can no longer call you the Scarlet Cockerel with truth, for you have suddenly attained the wisdom of the eagle. These knaves never served under your father, Blaise. I was Gervaise de Breault's second in command during the Italian campaigns and I should recognize these men had they been in his company; but to the best of my belief I have never before set eyes upon them. We will keep open our ears, which the good Lord gave us to hear with, and our eyes, which He provided for the purpose of seeing, and mayhap by the use of both we shall learn something to our advantage."

On days when the sea was rough we played in one

or another of the cabins at cards or dice; but on sunny days, when the water was smooth and the decks permitted of good footing, we practised one against the other at swordplay, with buttoned weapons. It was at such times that I had opportunities to study the marvelous fence of my friend, Martin Belcastel. It was like nothing I had ever seen. He had totally discarded the cut and made use only of the point — a loose, open style of play, apparently without system or rule, which he had perfected into a terrible and deadly thing. In addition to this new fashion of fence, he opposed to his enemy a wrist of steel and an infallible eye. As a result, not one of his opponents was able to touch him, while he, on his side, made hit after hit, seemingly at will.

So our days passed pleasantly enough for some weeks, until one night a heavy storm swooped suddenly out of the north upon us, and had we not been under reduced sail, owing to the strong breeze, we had, without doubt, seen the end then and there of the whole expedition. As it was, the waves ran so high as to break over the low decks amidships and drown the horses and cattle confined in the hold. Our consorts, the two caravels, made heavy work of it and were almost swamped by the immense seas that ran hard upon them. The galiot proved to be sound and seaworthy and we had no great damage, although for two days we ran before the storm with bare masts, until it blew itself out.

Two days later we sailed into a dense fog, which — Captain Ribault explained to me — was caused by

the meeting of a warm current in the sea with a colder one. It was a good sign, he remarked, because this warm current ran close to the coast we were seeking. He pointed out that the air was warmer and predicted joyfully that within a week we would sight the land. And every day thereafter he kept a sailor constantly at the masthead, on the lookout for land.

The air grew warm and balmy as we sailed; the days were bright with sunshine, the nights a glory of stars. On such a night I sat at the foot of the mainmast in the impenetrable shadow cast by the great sail above me, — hard as iron where it swelled in the fresh breeze, — listening to the subdued laughter from the cabins in the stern, the creak of spars, and the low hum of the wind through the ship's cordage. Waves slapped musically against the galiot's bow and raced swishing along her sides. But my mind was concerned with none of these things. It had traveled a long journey, back to a quiet Parisian garden. Did she think of me as often as I thought of her, I wondered? Or was there ever a thought of me in that proud little head?

It was just at that point in my reflections that I caught the low mutter of voices and the shuffle of feet, coming evidently from forward.

"All in good time, Pierre," were the first distinct words I heard. "Let not your greedy heart run away with your head." I twisted my body silently and peeped around the mast, to behold a rotund silhouette, above which towered in ludicrous contrast an unbelievably tall and angular figure. The brothers Barre!

"But, Michel," began the harsh voice of Pierre, "must — "

"Everything in its proper time, my friend," interrupted the other. "We must do nothing rash; the thing must be done in an orderly way or it will fail assuredly. After all, our object is to acquire information, not blows. You love blows — when you deal them, eh, Pierre?" he inquired, his voice fairly dripping with ironic contempt. "But remember," he went on, "this Belcastel is a very demon and the boy hardly — "

With that they passed out of earshot, and took their way down the ladder to their quarters in the fore part of the vessel. Upon my reporting this to Martin, he advocated silence and a continuance of our waiting and watching.

The next morning we saw a flight of gulls; and in the late afternoon the watch at the masthead woke us all to frantic interest by a shout of "Land!" At sunset we could see plainly the shadowy blue line of the coast.

V

THE FORT IN THE WILDERNESS

At the point where we had struck the coast a river ran into the sea; and as we approached nearer we discovered a great commotion in the water near the river's mouth, caused, we soon learned, by the playful gambols of large numbers of that strange sea animal, the dolphin; so among us the stream became known thereafter as the River of Dolphins. In the dusk we bore away, before a gentle wind, to the north. I slept but little, excited at the prospect of the landing in the morning, which Captain Ribault had decided upon, my imagination busy with the novel sights I might see upon this alien shore. Had I foreseen the future, my thoughts might have taken another color than the rosy one which now tinted them.

At dawn everyone was on deck, cheerful at the prospect of once more setting foot upon stable land. Captain Ribault superintended the loading in one of the boats of a great stone post, carved with the arms of France, which he purposed to set up in this new land, — a territory which he intended to claim for our sovereign. Half a league away we could see the wide mouth of a great river and the white caps of breakers foaming on a long bar where it met the ocean. Captain Ribault considered it best for us first to investigate before endeavoring to sail the vessels into the

river; and it was with this in mind that we put off from the ship's side in small boats, shortly after sunrise. Around us the sea was transformed into molten, heaving gold by the first yellow glow of the new sun; above us the foreign sky was a deep blue; and the air, softly fragrant, was strangely clear. Before us the line of surf barred the way to a sluggish stream that oozed sleepily between two narrow spits of land into the restless sea. To the north of the river lay a great salt-marsh, seemingly interminable in extent, where pools of water, left by the retiring tide, gleamed through a coarse rank growth of grasses. To the south was a dense and tangled thicket of immense trees, underbrush, creeping vines, all hung with a drooping, hairy moss, giving the huge trees the aspect of very old, gray-bearded men, condemned to stand forever on the bank of the sullen river.

All this became apparent as we approached the rank of waves that broke foaming on the bar. After some manœuvering we found a broad and smooth passage through the troubled waters, but it was rather shallow — not of sufficient depth, our captain feared, to allow the passage of the galiot, although the caravels could sail through in safety. Beneath the clear water the sharp and cruel jut of fang-like rocks could be clearly seen, and I, for one, was much more cheerful when we had passed into the smooth water of the river — la Rivière de Mai we called it, since this was the first day of May.

We passed a full half-league up this slow-moving stream, between the desolate salt-marsh and the dark

mystery of the silent forest, before we found a suitable landing-place. Then we ran the boats into the shore, and the sailors, under the direction of our worthy captain, unloaded and set up the stone pillar in a little open glade in the forest. After this was done, and Captain Ribault had taken possession of this new land for France, in the King's name, he knelt down and thanked God in a loud voice for His protection from the perils of the deep and for our safe landing. The sun's rays, struggling through the dark foliage of the trees, flooded the open space wherein we stood, glimmered brightly on the burnished steel of cuirass and morion, on the kneeling figure of Jean Ribault, on the intent faces of the company — a cheerful omen, I thought, in my ignorance. As I glanced up from my contemplation of the earnest face of our commander, my eye fell upon the vast bulk of Michel Barre, watching with iron eye, a satiric smile about his gross lips, like a street gamin with tongue in cheek.

As Monsieur Ribault arose from his knees there appeared suddenly in the glade nine of the inhabitants of the country. Their leader held up his hand in token of peace, and Jean Ribault advanced to meet him. He was a tall, beardless man of dark coppery hue, who walked with the free and springy stride, the erect and kingly mien, of one in authority. His black eyes were keen and fearless, and he looked the chief he was. Upon his head he wore a beautiful headdress of particolored feathers; upon his person, a delicately tinted cloak of the same material with a few ornaments of gold. His stalwart legs were bound with many wrap-

pings of cloth and his feet encased in soft fawn-colored shoes of deerskin, ornamented with colored stitching and patterns of quillwork. Such was Satouriona, chieftain of the Criques, a true king and a loyal friend to Frenchmen — and especially to me, as the future was to prove at no very distant time.

He addressed our captain in a strange guttural tongue which none of us could understand. Jean Ribault shook his head, but held up his hand to signify that we were peaceful. Behind their leader his companions, similarly dressed though not so richly, stood in a silent group, their watchful eyes attentive to every movement of our party. Captain Ribault and the tall savage conversed as best they could by signs, until at last the stranger, pointing to himself, pronounced the word "Satouriona."

"Ami! Ami!" replied our captain, indicating our whole company, to assure this Satouriona we were friends. After further explanations in the sign language, gifts were exchanged and the pleasantest relations were established with the barbarians. We parted from them with the very best feelings on both sides, returning to the galiot, which had been standing off and on beyond the surf-barrier, awaiting our return.

A council was immediately called, and after much discussion it was decided to seek further for a permanent site for the colony, owing to the difficulty of navigating the bar. De Laudonnière alone declared for a further exploration of the Rivière de Mai, being certain, he assured us, that at a greater distance inland we could doubtless find a good location for a settle-

ment. But he was overruled; and late that afternoon we sailed northward, before light but favoring winds, passing along a flat and uninteresting coast of few harbors, and those shallow and unsheltered, until on the second morning we sighted an opening in the low shore-line of more promise; and when we had sailed into it, we found it to be, as Monsieur Ribault told us joyfully, "a large and fair haven." As we penetrated more deeply into it, we found that a goodly river and many smaller streams wound lazily through the surrounding swamps and bogs to empty their turbid waters into the sea. At midday we cast anchor near an island of considerable extent.

The next few days we spent in examining carefully the surrounding country. Parties were detailed with boats to follow the river and the various smaller streams in the vicinity, while to Belcastel, De Jonville and me, with three sailors, fell the task of exploring the island. At the end of three days all had returned safely and reported to Monsieur Ribault. These reports determined our captain to found the colony on the island, rather than on the mainland, as there was a much larger area of tillable land, and the conditions were more healthful. So without delay the work of constructing a fort for our protection was begun, some groups of men being told off to cut the necessary logs and others to put them into place. The work went forward steadily, and in a surprisingly short time Fort Charles, as Jean Ribault named it in honor of the King of France, began to take shape, and the houses within the enclosure became habitable.

Because of our skill with the crossbow, Belcastel and I were assigned the task of hunting in the forests on the mainland, so that our supplies might be supplemented with fresh meat. We proved at first poor woodsmen: in the boundless twilight of those tangled thickets, annoyed by clouds of insects, hemmed in by stagnant and stinking marshes, we were like lost children, making our way about by an instinct that many times played us false, forced to spend many unpleasant nights in the forbidding wilderness, among horrors and dangers of which we did not dream at the time. Ma foi! Had the good God not looked after us, I had never lived to set down these words. It was among these slow streams, treacherous marshes, and immense trees, standing on high roots above the quivering surface of the boglands, that we heard the wondrous-sweet songs of unknown birds, saw queer and dangerous reptiles and strange varieties of animals. Here we learned to tread cautiously the rustling carpet of the woods; to hunt cunningly; to drift in silence on the slow streams in our boat, taking pike, perch, and many other fish for which we knew no name. With our game and the many presents brought by the savage inhabitants of the neighborhood there was enough for all.

Drifting thus one afternoon on the still surface of one of the tributaries of the river, we heard the mumble of voices in the brushwood on the bank at our right. I looked at Belcastel, who sat in the stern of the boat, and he shook his head imperceptibly, placing his finger on his lips. As we drifted noiselessly under an over-

hanging branch, I seized it and stayed the progress of the boat.

" — Scarlet Cockerel, eh?" were the first words we heard. "We've wrung tougher necks — "

"Ah, my brother, with what a wonderfully thick skull le bon Dieu has blessed you!" broke in a satirical voice. "A head-wound would mean nothing to you. We must take the boy alive or we shall never learn his secret."

"Maladetta! You've harped long enough on that," answered the other. "But how? Answer me that, you who are so wise."

"We must wait, you fool! Anyone could see — "

At that instant the branch in my hand broke off, with a sharp snapping noise. There was an instant of silence, followed by a slight rustling and the light padding of feet on soft ground.

I leaped to my feet, rocking the boat madly, but Martin Belcastel thrust me down again before I could make good my intention of jumping ashore in pursuit of the plotters. With one violent thrust of his oar he shot the boat into a narrow stretch of water, enclosed from prying eyes by heavy foliage. For a few minutes we said no word, but continued to move in silence downstream.

"One of these gentry is not averse to slitting your throat, Blaise, and he might very well have done it in the heat of surprise," Martin remarked at last. "When next we meet them, I shall try to learn if we were seen."

During the rest of the afternoon I had ample time

for reflection upon the strange words of Michel Barre, for I had recognized his ironic voice at once. He had referred to my "secret," but this meant nothing to me, for I could think of nothing I knew that deserved to be dignified as a secret. I confided as much to Martin Belcastel, who remarked that time and patience would doubtless solve the problem.

At the gate of Fort Charles, upon our return that evening, we came upon Michel Barre, who inquired in a smooth and oily voice after our luck at the hunting. After Belcastel's mildly courteous reply that the territory south of the river, where we had been the whole afternoon, did not seem as good as it might be, there flashed for an instant in his single eye an unmistakable look of relief. But it had been north of the river that we spent our day.

VI

MUTINY AND A WINTER SEA

It was but a few days later that Jean Ribault announced his intention of returning to France for further supplies, and offered to take back with him such of the colonists as were discontented. Most of them, however, signified their intention of remaining in the New World, and among these, of course, were Martin Belcastel and I. Monsieur Ribault spoke earnestly to the entire colony, recommending to them the necessity of tilling the soil, and calling their attention to the good results that would attend on a careful cultivation of this virgin land. He appointed Monsieur de la Pierra to be the captain over all of us, with supreme authority to act as he saw fit for the best interests of everyone. Then he sailed away, promising to return in the late autumn.

In the months that followed there arose in the colony a spirit of revolt against the hard and unremitting toil forced upon the men by Captain Pierra. He proved to be a martinet of the most inflexible type, enforcing his orders with an iron hand. And yet, the man was governed entirely, I think, by his sense of duty and a desire to make the colony a success. A soldier, he knew no law except that of camp and barrack, the harsh code of military rule. At first there were furtive whisperings, then, open talk. Men left the island

secretly upon expeditions among the red men in fruitless search for gold; the work of clearing and cultivating the land was neglected. Slowly but surely the situation moved toward the inevitable end — an open break between the commander and the men.

At last Captain Pierra forced the issue by stating flatly that the next man who left the island without permission would be judged guilty of mutiny and executed without further trial. Martin Belcastel remonstrated, but without result, and Martin and I were hated alike with Captain Pierra, for we alone had remained loyal to him. Most of this ill feeling centred itself about the brothers Barre, although, strangely enough, it was the long, lank Pierre who seemed to lead, while his ironic brother moved innocently enough about the island with customary soft-footed ease — the catlike agility that amazed me so greatly. He greeted me, when occasion arose, with that sleek and exaggerated courtesy which smacked so strongly of a satiric and constitutional insincerity. At times I thought I distinguished in his single restless eye, when it rested upon me, a puzzled and speculative look.

Summer gave way to autumn, and autumn to a mild and beneficent winter. Supplies were running low, and we looked in vain for the loom of Jean Ribault's sails on the horizon. Men were morose and surly under the severe government of Captain Pierra, but they obeyed his commands, of necessity.

Then with startling swiftness these half-hidden currents of hatred rushed to a terrible conclusion.

Returning one day from an expedition among the swamps in search of game, Belcastel learned from Captain Pierra that he had caught Pierre Barre in the act of returning from an unsanctioned expedition away from the island; that he proposed to make an example of him — "a lesson to those mutinous dogs." In short, Pierre Barre was to be shot next morning at sunrise. Belcastel received the news without comment, but we discussed it at some length, agreeing in the end to see if we could not prevail upon our commander to alter his decision, and avert what seemed to us a certain catastrophe.

Captain Pierra proved stubborn upon the point, reminding Belcastel that discipline must be maintained. He faced us across a rude table, upon which burned a single candle, lighting with a dim yellow glow his stern soldier face, with its thin dark moustache, neatly trimmed beard, out-thrust jaw, and stern black eyes.

"But you are not commanding soldiers, monsieur," Martin said.

"My decision is unalterable, Monsieur Belcastel," answered Pierra shortly.

"Monsieur," Martin returned, with due courtesy, yet with conviction, "it is my opinion that you are about to commit a rash act. I believe by morning you will have as pretty a little mutiny on your hands as man will ever see — and it may cost all three of us our lives."

The captain made no reply, save to bow his head, and we left the room. Near the door we met Michel

Barre, who, I suspect, had been observing us through the window. He bowed low, as was his custom, but said no word. His face was sombre; and in this new aspect the black patch gave him a singularly sinister bearing.

The narrow road was filled with men conversing excitedly. The buzz of conversation died at our approach, only to begin again, louder than ever, after we had passed. We were the target for many insolent and sneering eyes, although there was no attempt made against us. Arrived safely in our quarters, Martin remarked that in order to be ready for anything it would be well to place our boat in some secret place where we could easily make an escape; "for, mark me," he concluded, "there will be serious trouble at sunrise."

"Nay, Martin," I cried, "I am sick of running away. Let us stay and fight! We can stand off this rabble."

Martin smiled. "Still the Scarlet Cockerel, eh? Well, let it stand as it is. We shall see at dawn. I shall move the boat, nevertheless, 'twill do no harm." He went out.

During his absence I fell asleep, to dream of the sombre and ironic face of the one-eyed man, a lovely girl in a quiet garden, the hard, inflexible visage of Captain Pierra. It was still dark when I awoke, to find Martin Belcastel standing over me.

"Sleeps like a dead man," he said, his shadowy shoulders shaking with laughter, "as though he were safe in his father's house, instead of in a wilderness surrounded by enemies. Up, Blaise, up! You — "

I sat up at once. "That's better! Sword and dagger — you're like to need them."

I said nothing, but shivered sleepily in the sharp morning air.

As we stepped out of the door into the chill dawn there was a faint yellow glow in the east, where the sun fought valiantly to pierce the dismal banks of clouds hanging over the sea. A cold wind was blowing. When we arrived at the little square in the centre of the fort we found most of the colonists already there, huddled in a silent group. We took our stand apart from them, near one of the log buildings. Michel Barre was nowhere to be seen.

In a few minutes the condemned man appeared, escorted by the four soldiers who had thus far proved loyal to their commander. Behind marched Captain Pierra, with drawn sword. Pierre Barre displayed an admirable composure in the face of death — even a bravado, for he wore on his harsh features a broad smile and he walked with a firm step. Not a word was spoken as the prisoner was placed, and the firing squad took up their position. I felt a moment of pity for the lonely figure, tragically ludicrous, facing the muskets.

At this juncture the corporal turned to Captain Pierra and said loudly, "Captain, we cannot fire upon this man, for he has done nothing to merit death."

The smile on Pierre's face became insolently broad. I now understood his bravado — he knew they would refuse their duty.

At these words the severe lines of Captain Pierra's

countenance set in icy rage. He thrust his bared sword into its scabbard, but said nothing. Before anyone could move he snatched the musket from the corporal's hands, took careful aim, and fired. The smile faded from Pierre's countenance, replaced by an expression of astounded terror. He crumpled slowly to the ground.

In that instant something flashed in the feeble sunshine and there was the sharp whining twang of a bowstring. Captain Pierra fell, writhing, plucking madly at the heavy crossbow-bolt plunged fair through his throat to the very feather. Of the marksman nothing was to be seen. There was a moment of total silence; then a chorus of scattering shouts and exclamations from the mass of men across the square. The groups broke up, some running to Pierre's quiet body, some to where the captain lay in a contorted position, jerking and quivering in his last agonies; but a number made straight across the open square toward us. Martin Belcastel touched my arm, as I stood gaping like a fool, dazed by the rapidity of the events that had just taken place.

"Time to be gone, Blaise," he said quietly, smiling a little in his cool way. We caught up our swords and ran.

We met no one, for the whole colony had been assembled in the square. As we passed through the gate Martin turned sharply to the east, directing his course toward a low hill that dominated the island. As we toiled up the long slope, I could hear the cries of pursuers behind us. At the top, breathless and

exhausted, I looked out over the sea, hoping to behold, perhaps, the sails of Jean Ribault's vessels; but the waters lay vast and empty before us, troubled and rough under a strong wind. The world was gray about us; the sun smothered under heavy and threatening clouds, rolling higher and higher above the distant horizon. We plunged into the thick underbrush on the seaward side of the hill, Martin still leading, a scant fifty paces ahead of our enemies.

At the foot of the hill, hidden in a shallow cove, we came upon the boat. Above us on the slope the chase had spread out to range the hillside. We loosed the boat and pushed off, rowing away from the shelter of the island. As we came close upon the great rock which guarded the entrance of the cove, Michel Barre appeared suddenly upon its summit. His lone eye glared fiercely from the shadow of his rusty black hat. In his hand he bore a crossbow.

"Au revoir, messieurs!" he called across the water. "Till we meet again!" Then, seeing a look of doubt upon my face, with a terrible smile he added, "Oh, it will come to pass, Monsieur de Breault — it will surely come to pass!" There was a prophetic ring to the words which convinced me, unwillingly, of their truth. I made no reply, but glanced at Martin; he smiled disdainfully. When I looked again at the rock it was bare. The unwieldy figure had disappeared.

"Our obese friend seems to be a prophet as well as a dealer in secrets," Martin said, after a few moments of silence. "I fancy he is right! Men of our stamp are not easily killed, and I am sure that Michel Barre

will prove, in the end, to have nine lives like a cat."

"He is a dangerous man, without doubt," I replied thoughtfully, as I remembered Pierra's death and the weapon in fat Michel's hand.

Being poor sailors, we decided to run before the strong breeze; so, in accordance with this plan, we stepped the short mast and set the sail with which the boat was provided. We stood out between the two points of land at the harbor-mouth into the open sea, and then bore away to the northward along the coast, before a wind that increased gradually into a gale. All day we sailed upon the angry waste of that winter sea, the boat plunging and rolling among mountainous waves that threatened each second to sink us, so that I, at least, stood in constant fear of a watery death. Of a sudden darkness began to fall, and we looked about for a place to land; but all we could see was a flat beach, upon which a heavy surf broke savagely.

Then, in the twinkling of an eye, there came a grating sound beneath us; the boat rose almost to the perpendicular; I received a violent blow upon the head and was flung into the raging sea. Another hard blow, and I knew no more.

BOOK TWO

STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND

VII

THE SANTEES

When I came to myself, the sun was bright in my eyes and the roar of surf loud in my ears. Martin Belcastel — how patiently he watched over my youth and inexperience — bent above me with an anxious face. As soon as he saw my eyes open his troubled eyes cleared, he smiled cheerfully and opened his mouth to speak, but sprang to his feet instead, and ran madly down the shingle, waving his arms and shouting loudly. "A plague upon the birds!" his words floated back to me. "Mordieu! They'll leave us to starve yet!"

I sat up suddenly — Corbleu! How my head thumped — in time to see a cloud of gulls rise from the sand at Martin's approach. I climbed slowly to my feet, discovering as I did that I was sore in every muscle from the battering of the sea; but my bones seemed to be whole, for which I was thankful. I made what shift I could to hobble toward the place where Martin was kneeling, examining something on the sand before him. From somewhere came the rank odor of marshes; above us waved the long leaves of lofty trees, whose slender and graceful trunks shot up to a great height without a single branch; behind these lay the matted mazes of the jungle, soundless and dim. The sea was still angry, and as I saw the

huge breakers thundering upon the shore, I marveled that I had come through it alive. In fact I began to wonder how I had come ashore. High on the sands I saw what I took to be a large rock, but later found to be our boat with her bows stove in, ruined beyond repair.

When I came up to Martin I found him examining with attention a store of ship biscuit and dried meat, which he had spread upon the ground to dry.

"One more visit from these gulls," he remarked, dryly, "and we shall, in good truth, be in a bad way. Ma foi! I am glad to see you walking about on your two feet. It was close work for a few minutes — I feared we should never make the shore."

"I know nothing about it," I said. "Tell me how I came ashore. I swear I can remember — "

"Never mind," he said, "we are here, for which we owe thanks to our good Lord. After we struck the rocks, which hurled us into the sea, it was doubtful whether we should ever again see the sunrise. Parbleu — a sailor is a brave man, indeed!"

"But I am sure I owe my life to you! You brought me to land."

"Nay, Blaise!" Martin looked uncomfortable. "I only gave what help I could and took good care to look after my own precious skin. What to do next is the question. Fortunately we are not without resources. When the boat washed in I found the crossbows and our swords still in it, and the food."

I was rejoiced to hear that my sword was not lost, for it was a good blade, long in our family, and had

outworn many a scabbard. While Martin gathered up the biscuit, which he had spread out to dry in the warm sun, I took up the weapon from the small pile of our belongings, wiped the blade, and rubbed off the rust left there by the sea water. We talked long and earnestly, discussing plans for the future. Martin was for plunging into the forest, while I thought best to stay near the sea in the faint hope of being picked up by Monsieur Ribault's ships upon his return.

Martin smiled sadly at this. " 'Tis but a faint hope you hold out, my boy. Something has detained Jean Ribault or he'd have returned before now. Shipwreck, mayhap! We might as well face the truth: we're in a bad situation, a tight place! You are right in one way: let us stay by the coast until we come to a river; it would be hard to penetrate this swamp land on foot."

"And then, perhaps," I said, cheerfully, "we shall swim up the river and live off the country as le Duc d'Enghien's army lived off the Italians."

"As fair a plan as any," said Martin, chuckling. "Shall we march now, Monsieur de Breault?"

"At once, Monsieur Belcastel! But slowly, slowly! My poor body feels as though it had been well beaten by a hundred men."

Within a short time we were on our way, walking over the firm sands of the beach in a general northerly direction. As we marched, I took stock of myself. My clothes were faded and stained with salt water; there was a great rent across the breast of my doublet;

my cap was gone; my shoes were in a bad way, so before the day was over I was barefoot — faith, there was little of the scarlet cockerel about me now; and Martin Belcastel was in no better case. We had small resemblance to two French gentlemen starting upon a great adventure, but looked rather like a brace of forlorn and destitute beggars.

That night we slept upon the sands, after a cheerless meal of biscuit and dried meats. The night wind being sharp and my feet sore from the long march, I got scanty rest. The next day and night were little better; but the third morning we came upon a muddy, sluggish stream of some consequence. This brought us to an abrupt stop, for it was evident, at a glance, that we must have a boat to make any farther progress. To penetrate the thick mass of vegetation which flanked the river was manifestly impossible. We gazed disconsolately at the prospect before us.

Martin sat upon the ground and began to examine his feet, which were sore and inflamed from much travel without shoes; I joined him, and in a short time fell asleep upon the warm sand. When I awoke the sun was high in the heavens, and I calculated from that, and from a great emptiness which I felt, that it was near noon. Near by, Martin was sleeping soundly. When I awoke him, he sat up quickly, smiling, but when he glanced about him the smile disappeared at once.

"Peste, Blaise! you have wakened me at a very bad time," he cried ruefully. "I had just converted François de Guise to the true faith — by the sword

— and in thankfulness he invited me to dine with him. We were in the midst of our meal when you — "

"I awoke you to share my banquet," I said. "Martin, I have a great emptiness."

"Well, 'tis not so good as the other; but we must needs make the best of it," he replied philosophically, reaching for the package of food as he spoke.

It had an unexpected lightness in his hand, and he looked at it sharply, turning it over, and we both saw a hole in the sailcloth with which it was wrapped; and as we looked there popped from the hole a large and well-fed field-mouse that scampered wildly into the tall grass near by. Martin started and dropped the empty bundle; then, at sight of my woebegone face, burst into shouts of laughter.

A little later, when his features had resumed their usual gravity, he remarked, "Well, since the banquet is over, we must consider our next step." The seriousness of his manner, compared to the import of his words, seemed irresistibly comic, so that I roared merrily in my turn.

Happening at this moment to cast my gaze toward the river, I was startled to behold the prows of two large boats pushing their way through the rank grasses that grew on the bank. Above them the feathered heads of six savages were to be seen, peering at us with curious eyes. I sprang up and snatched my sword from the ground. As I was about to draw it, Martin Belcastel got upon his feet and laid his hand upon my arm.

"You young cockerel!" he said, severely, "put up

your sword! This is no matter for swords. We must be pacific with these heathen!"

The red men had disembarked and were now advancing slowly in our direction. Martin went to meet them, holding his weaponless hands above his head. The splendid young savage in the lead replied by a like sign. When they had arrived within a short distance of each other the barbarian halted and addressed Martin in his guttural language. Martin shook his head and made signs of friendship, repeating at the same time "Ami! Ami!" Then began a long conversation by means of signs. Upon the smooth sand Martin drew a diagram of the fort and the details of our flight, and about the drawing we all squatted on our haunches in an interested circle. As Martin indicated our various adventures by pictures in the sand, the savages nodded violently to show their understanding. At last we all stood up, and Martin made a wry grimace and rubbed his lank stomach to show his hunger; whereupon our new acquaintances nodded again and pointed to the two boats drawn up on the shore.

We looked at each other questioningly. "It seems about the only thing to do, eh, Blaise?" he asked. I nodded; and with one accord we picked up our few belongings and proceeded to embark — one in each boat — with the red men. So began our life among these barbarians, who proved to be men much like ourselves.

All the afternoon we pushed up the broad river, which ran like a road through the deep green of the

jungle. Great reptiles sunned themselves on slimy mudbanks, and birds of bright plumage darted among the gloomy aisles of trees. During all those long hours the savages took no rest from their paddles, and I much admired their endurance and the deftness with which they handled their boats. The lean, muscular bodies swayed in unison, in silence except for an occasional grunt. The boats moved steadily upstream, through the gray mist which hung in the still air. We passed innumerable tortoises, sleeping on half-submerged logs, and once a huge serpent of dull brown color, with a mouth of dirty white, slid sullenly into the water at our approach.

My heart sank within me, as I looked upon this constant procession of twisted roots, tortured trunks surmounted by foliage of a poisonous green, draped in silvery, ghostly moss, noisome pools glittering evilly in the half-light, and frequented by I knew not what deadly and monstrous inhabitants. France seemed far away, indeed; I feared that I should never again see its orderly fields and vineyards, its straight roads and busy towns. Still more, I was sure that I should never again set eyes upon that sweet face which was so often in my thought. Once the swarthy, ironic visage of fat Michel popped unbidden into my mind, but only to be driven out by further conjectures on my probable fate in this boundless wilderness.

As our boats proceeded, side by side, up the dark stream, Martin Belcastel called occasional comments across the water to me; but for the most part we were silent until sunset, when the boats were finally turned

toward the shore and nosed their way to a place among a great number of other boats, pulled upon the bank. Numerous brown children who played among them stared with big, black eyes, wide with curiosity, at our white faces and strange dress. As we proceeded to climb the gentle slope of a hill to a village that we could see at the top, they preceded us, shouting and pointing. Their habitations were made of the bark from trees. Women were busy cooking over fires in front of the doors, while the men lounged about lazily or talked together in small groups. Wolflike dogs slunk here and there.

At last we halted before one of the huts, considerably larger than its neighbors, and the savage who conducted us made a sign to wait while he went within. He reappeared in a short time with a tall and magnificent barbarian, whose authoritative mien and intelligent face led Martin to say in a low voice, "This is their king, beyond a doubt."

The younger savage was talking rapidly in their barbarous tongue, doubtless explaining our presence, and the newcomer glanced at us keenly from time to time. After a few moments he came up to us and held up his right hand in token of welcome; then pointing to himself said the word, "Sapona," several times over. Martin imitated his gestures and named himself, Martin, and me, Blaise. Then at a sign from our guide we followed him to a house near by, which was evidently assigned to us. It contained nothing save some animal skins, upon which I cast myself immediately, for I was weary through and through.

Then it came to me that my skin was hot and dry, and abominable pain began to pierce my head. I spoke of this to Martin Belcastel, but have no recollection of any answer from him.

When next I awoke Martin Belcastel and an aged savage were trying to force between my clenched teeth a draught of some nauseous liquid, which I first refused indignantly, then swallowed with much difficulty. The stranger was decorated with many queer emblems sewed upon his dress, and strings of teeth, claws, and shiny stones hung about his skinny neck. He passed a clawlike hand across my face, which was wet with sweat, nodding his head quickly several times. After he had withdrawn I asked Martin, in a voice weak as a girl's, who he might be.

"A very worthy man," Martin replied. "He is the chief leech of this village, and has saved your life with his purge from leaves of herbs. This sickness seems to be well known to the people."

Then I noticed that Martin was dressed in a new garb of gray; and the chief, Sapona, had presented each of us with new apparel made from deerskin, also shoes of the same with much bright quillwork. The name of this people, Martin said, was "Santee"; a peaceful tribe of hunters living on game, fish, and a coarse bread, made from a strange grain, like unto none he had seen before.

Later the leech returned and signified that I must follow him, but I was so weak I could scarce arise. Martin assisted me, and we followed him to a small hut of bark, wherein was a bench made of branches and a

pit filled with water. Here my bare body was wrapped in heavy robes of feathers. After the old man had left me, two women came in with hot stones, which they dropped into the water, so that the hut was soon filled with warm vapor, causing me to sweat profusely. When this had gone on for some time, the women came in and, in spite of my objections, stripped off all my coverings, leaving me naked and ashamed; then they poured over me large gourds of cold water, until I was thoroughly cleansed. Afterward I learned that this was the ordinary way among this people; but Martin at the time roared with laughter and poked much fun at me.

During the next few days, while I was regaining my strength, I saw women fashioning beautiful garments of feathers, belts and sashes of hair with many designs of divers colors, shoes and garments of deerskin. Their boats, which were called "caneus," were made each from a single tree hollowed by fire. After a fire had burned out the entire central part of the log, the boat was finished and shaped with hatchets of hard flint, brought from a great distance.

Life was simple among these savages; the women tilling the soil, tanning the hides, performing all the menial tasks of a household, while the men hunted in the forests or fished in the streams. It was here I first ran upon that odd custom of smoking tobacco, and it was fascinating to me to watch the men lounging before their huts in the evening, drawing upon their pipes with serene enjoyment, breathing out clouds of smoke with the utmost unconcern. So common had this

habit become that the pipe was passed among them in their councils as a symbol of peace and brotherhood. But I could never get the trick of it. The acrid smoke so irked me that I gladly gave over the task of learning to use this herb.

My vigor came back to me, and before many days had passed I was again hunting in the forest with Martin Belcastel. That iron-framed man took no hurt from the fever-ridden marshes about him, and he entered into our new life with great enjoyment.

VIII

THE HOOT OF AN OWL

After a few days we ceased to be a wonder to these people, except when Martin and I practised at sword-play. I contrived a wooden button for our weapons, and although the play was rough and my body constantly black and blue where Martin's superior fence inflicted many hard thumps upon my poor ribs, I made shift to learn from him much of his loose but deadly method. These bouts delighted our red friends, as did any martial or skillful game. We learned from them many tricks of wrestling, also how to paddle and handle the caneu, which is an art in itself. It was in his first attempt to learn this art that Martin almost lost his life. When a few yards from shore, Martin in some manner overturned the boat. No sooner had he come to the surface than there appeared near him one of those huge reptiles, so common in those waters, of scaly and repulsive appearance, longer than twice the height of a tall man.

"Mordieu! Martin, hurry!" I cried, and snatched from the ground a paddle which lay there. Martin redoubled his efforts, but the monster gained on him. I rushed into the shallows, shouting and waving the paddle, but made slow progress in the soft clinging mud. Just as the reptile was closing in upon his prey, I reached Martin's leather shirt and gave a tre-

mendous heave, which put him many feet nearer the shore. Then I turned and drove the long, lozenge-shaped paddle far into the gaping, cavernous throat. Martin and I made our best speed to the bank. There we stood, dripping and panting, the centre of an astonished group of savages. Martin's pursuer had sunk from sight, but the splintered remains of the paddle floated on the river's surface, a short distance away.

"Ah, Blaise!" said Martin, embracing me; "you are a true brave!" This was indeed high praise from my great-hearted comrade, who regarded courageous feats as part of the day's work.

The mild winter passed swiftly. Spring came; the women prepared to plant grain; days became longer and the air grew balmy. Martin had invented a calendar, which consisted of a string to which he added a knot each day, so that, by counting backward to the day when we escaped the mutineers at Fort Charles, he was able to keep an accurate record of the months. We learned much of woodcraft from our savage friends; and as our skill increased, our hunting prospered accordingly. Our bodies hardened until we scarcely knew fatigue.

In April came heavy rains; the river spread beyond its banks, and the bayous and ponds about us grew to great size. We were unable to leave the village except in our caneus; and were forced to go long distances to hunt, for the spread of the waters had driven the game to scattered areas of higher land. There were other villages of Santees scattered along the river and

among the marshes of the smaller streams that fed it. These we visited with our savage friends, and found in them the same easy, peaceful life.

In May we noticed much unusual activity in our village. Treasures of furs, feathered garments, and finely woven haircloth belts were brought out and examined; dress and weapons were brightened up, and caneus put in good order. A journey was in prospect. Martin, who had acquired more of their language than I, made inquiry of our first friend — that young savage with whom Martin had talked on the sands and who was called in their language, "The Deer." He told Martin that at this season of the year it was the custom to go three easy days' journey up the river to trade with a tribe who lived many days' travel to the west. When they started we were given places in the Deer's caneu.

All the first day we moved through the dismal twilight of the marshes, but during the second day the water grew clearer and the crooked, unnatural trees of the swamps gave way to open and pleasant forests of pine and oak. On the third day, at the setting of the sun, we came upon a place where the water flowed white and swift, and having passed through this, we landed on a point where two large streams joined. There we awaited the coming of the men from the west. In that direction rolling, wooded hills rose gradually to the misty blue heights of mountains. The mystery of what they hid beckoned to Martin's adventurous soul, and he observed that it might be well for us to cross the mountains and claim the land

beyond for France. We talked long that night concerning the empire France must carve out for herself in these wilds.

On the second day came the expected tribesmen, with many arrow- and axe-heads of flint, baskets of divers pretty hues, gold and silver ornaments. There was a deal of bargaining between the parties before the trading was done. We heard much from these strangers of tribes who lived beyond the "great water," from whom they obtained the gold and silver which they traded to the Santees. We became very curious about this "great water," and speculated at length upon its size and the magnitude of this new world; for it appeared, from the talk of these red men, that this was a very broad domain.

It was with regret that we returned to the routine of our life in the dark marshes; and Martin declared that he, for one, should come back to that fair land; and at no distant time. And return we did; but under different circumstances from those we would have chosen!

A few days after our return occurred an event of great consequence, though at the time I gave it no thought. I was sitting, hidden in thick bushes, beside a clearing, where deer were known to walk, hoping to slay a buck before darkness fell. The silence was absolute, yet suddenly I became aware of the figure of a man standing at the farther side of the narrow glade. He was a burly and powerful savage, larger than any red man I had yet seen, and I wondered to which of the surrounding villages he belonged. Then I

saw that his face was painted with streaks of yellow and white, with two great circles of black about his glittering eyes, while his broad, deep breast was painted with two emblems in white. He was naked, except for a strip of deerskin about his loins, and his head was shaved to leave a long lock of hair on top, into which was thrust a single feather. Even as I looked, he faded into the underbrush behind him, as silently as he had come. The occurrence was startling; but it slipped from my mind as I fell to dreaming of France and speculating upon what the future contained. My musings were rudely interrupted by a loud, whistling snort, so close at hand that I leaped to my feet, to find that a large deer with wide-spreading horns had come up and stood gazing at me, scarce an arm's length away. Before I could draw string, he made two tremendous bounds and disappeared into the forest. My dreaming had, in all probability, cost me my supper.

That night I heard, in the black stillness, the hoot of an owl, far to the north. Later it was repeated from the east. It was a common sound of the night, but it seemed at that moment to have a fateful and unusual significance. I shuddered, without knowing why.

The next day, as we were returning to the village, Martin had a glimpse of a shadowy figure among the trees near the river. I spoke then of the savage I had seen the day before; but he could make nothing of it, having no more experience of the ways of the people than I. And that night, shortly before I fell asleep,

I heard again the lonely cry of an owl, thrice repeated, from different points of the compass.

Much later I awoke. All about me the village lay steeped in slumber, quiet except for the movement of a restless dog. The still, close air seemed alive with unknown, creeping perils. Near by I could hear Martin's regular breathing. Then a dog began to bark. In the same instant there went up, near at hand, a piercing cry, long-sustained and terrifying, answered by a chorus of yells from all about the village. I leaped to seize sword and dagger.

"Up, Martin! Up!" I cried, and ran out. The first dim light of dawn was just breaking through the trees.

In the half light I could see the running figures of the Santees as they burst from their huts to meet the foe. In the faint light it was like a battle of shadows. The fierce whoops of the attackers and the defiant yells of the defenders filled the air. In the midst of the confusion I saw the women hurrying toward the river. Out of the shadow of one of the houses sprang the tall form of a foe. As he raised his arm to strike, I passed my sword through his body.

"After all, there's no weapon like the rapier," remarked Martin's calm voice at my side. We ran together to where the fight was hottest.

Sapona, the chief, was hard beset by his enemies, for with axe and knife he had hewed his way into the very heart of the struggle. By his side fought the Deer. But the enemy was strong in numbers, and three of them had succeeded in getting behind Sapona and his comrade, so we were just in time. I thrust

my blade through the nearest, while Martin bestowed a like compliment upon another. The third was struck down by a Santee, who came up at that moment. While their bodies were yet quivering, this newcomer grasped the single lock of hair on each head, passed his knife around the base of it and ripped hair and scalp from the head with one jerk.

The battle was going against us. Half the Santees were down, for, although they fought bravely, they were no match for the ferocious invaders. Sapona was slain by an arrow in the throat, and the Deer wounded so severely that, still fighting, he sank to the ground. Martin and I stood over him, making what play we could. About us, the Santees were flying into the woods. At last the foemen drew back from us; they had small taste for cold steel. Martin's eyes were blazing. The blood dripped from a wound in his cheek.

"We must get the Deer away," he said. "Can you carry him?"

I nodded.

"Get him down to the river, while I hold off these red devils."

As I bent down to raise our savage friend, something hissed above my head. When I touched him, the Deer rose to his feet, staggered a few paces and fell heavily. Once more I got him up on his feet and we made slow progress toward the boats. Near the foot of the hill a merciless painted face glared from the bushes, and a tall and powerful savage bounded into the path. His hand went back over his shoulder and

his axe sung through the air. The Deer was a dead weight on my left arm and I dodged as best I could, but felt a sharp pain in my ribs, as the missile struck glancingly. As he ran upon me, knife in hand, I dropped the wounded man to the ground and cut savagely. He dodged away and I thrust, burying my blade in him to the very hilt. I placed the Deer in the only canoe to be seen, and hurried back to Martin's assistance.

At the top of the hill I met him, almost surrounded by the savages, who yelped like wolves about him. Together we forced them back once more; then we turned and ran for the river, with the whole pack at our heels. We ran well, but they gained upon us. Arrows flew and knives were thrown, yet we were not struck. At last we reached the boat and Martin leaped into it. I gave it a great push and half jumped, half fell within, almost overturning it. Behind us went up a great yell of rage as we seized the paddles.

IX

WE MEET AN ACQUAINTANCE

In the forest about us we could hear the shouts of the conquerors and the death cries of the Santees. We pulled madly at the paddles. From the shore came the whoops of our pursuers; above our heads the occasional hiss of an arrow. Gradually the bedlam of cries became fainter and the savages who had followed us along the bank of the stream went back to join in the chase; but we kept up the killing work at the paddles until my back was like to break with every stroke. In the bottom of the boat the Deer lay still; in the bow Martin Belcastel's broad back swayed in silence. I lost all count of time, conscious only of my aching body, the regular dip and return of the paddle, the constant drip of sweat in my eyes. When we were three or four leagues up the stream from the village, and I thought I could stand the pace no longer, Martin turned to me a face streaked with sweat and blood. The cold glare of battle was gone; his eyes were steady and he spoke calmly.

"Mordieu! I can't go another stroke. How is it with you? Mayhap we had best stop now and see what we can do for our friend here. He seems in a bad way — Corbleu! But he is a mighty fighter!"

I nodded weakly. "Let us hide our boat in the thick bushes on the bank," I said, "and do what we can for

the Deer. We can lie hidden until night. We may travel more safely in the darkness!"

"That is an idea!" Martin replied. I turned the caneu toward the shore, where we hid the boat and made ourselves as comfortable as we could. The Deer had lost much blood and was weak; he made no sound under Martin's rough surgery. We debated in whispers over our plans. Martin insisted that I get some sleep while he stood guard; and upon his promise to awake me in two hours I lay down in the grass.

I went to sleep with a sense of certain security, leaving Martin sitting at the base of a great tree with his naked sword across his knees. I reflected once more on the friendship that had grown up between us, which resembled on Martin's part a father's love; on mine, a son's.

When Martin woke me the sun was low in the heavens and the gloom of night was descending upon the jungle. The Deer still slept. Martin raised a cautioning finger to his lips and whispered that one of the painted savages had passed up the river in a caneu, landing just around the bend of the stream. Martin remarked that we must have a bow and arrows to hunt with, else we should starve — and that shortly. With that enlightening observation, he placed his sword under his arm and vanished into the forest, leaving me to reflect upon his resourcefulness, for it would never have occurred to me to make a foray upon the enemy for the sole purpose of obtaining his weapons.

The minutes passed slowly; the light faded to dusk; still Martin had not returned. The silence was oppressive. Each splash of a leaping fish, each restless movement of the wounded savage near by startled me. All round the jungle teemed with dangers, covering with its dark mantle of secrecy the tragedies enacted within it. I gave Martin up for lost.

Far away an owl hooted and I leaped upright, sword in hand; but behind me I heard a chuckle and a tranquil voice saying, "It is dark enough to start now, and there is nothing to detain us since I have prevailed upon a child of Nature to lend us his weapons."

I whirled around, to behold Martin Belcastel advancing toward me. In the failing light I could just see that he carried in his hands a bow, and at his shoulder hung a quiver of arrows.

I dropped my sword and embraced him heartily, for it seemed to me, so real had been my fears, that he was returning from the dead.

"I have another fine prize," Martin said; and he took from his shirt a small bag of deerskin which proved to contain dried grain. We munched it cheerfully, and awakened the Deer, to partake of his share. A little later we launched our caneu and took up our journey to the west.

The next day I succeeded in bringing down a deer with the bow which Martin had acquired; and the rich steaks, broiled over a heartening fire, put new strength into us. Martin's wounds were doing very well, but the Deer was in a bad way, his wounds festering and mortifying, his whole body burning with fever.

At the end of the third night we arrived at the confluence of two streams; and I suggested to Martin that we stay in that vicinity until the Deer was recovered from his wounds, and it was so agreed.

We camped in the shadow of some great rocks on the bank of the crystal-clear river, which here ran swiftly in a rocky bed. Martin examined the wounds of our savage friend and shook his head gravely. It would be necessary, he said, to cut away the bad flesh before they could heal. This was explained to the Deer in one of his lucid moments, and he agreed that it would better be done at once. With the poor savage Martin was as tender as a woman. That hand, so heavy in battle, had a touch as light as a feather, but, at best, it was a painful operation. With his dagger he cut away the corrupted flesh until the bright blood ran in streams from the wounds, cleansed them with cold water, and bound them carefully. Through it all the Deer let no sound escape him — I marveled at his stoic spirit. By the next evening the fever had disappeared, and the Deer began at once to mend.

Martin's calendar had been left behind us, but he at once began a new one, cutting a notch each day on the bow. When our patient had so far recovered that he could move about the camp, Martin and I made a journey of several days to the top of the blue ridge of mountains to the west. Beyond them lay a long, fertile valley, hemmed in on the west by the purple-misty heights of another range, crowned with trees, all enveloped in a haze of mystery that insistently beckoned to us.

We talked at length with the Deer about the probable fate of his people. He was sure the survivors had gone to one of the other villages in the neighborhood, but he feared they were few who had escaped the massacre. The attackers were a warlike race, living many days' journey northward, and called Irkoi. Terrible warriors, they had founded a powerful nation of many tribes, raiding their weaker neighbors without mercy, carrying off the woman and killing all who stood in their way, their lodges many as the trees of the forest, their numbers as the blades of grass upon the earth — not to be counted.

Then began for us a leisurely progress to the southward, with frequent halts of several days, while we hunted in the grassy glades or fished in the clear streams. We clung to the hills, avoiding the dim and ugly swamps, making short moves each day, while the Deer slowly regained his strength. One day we came suddenly upon a large bear, scratching at a hole in the trunk of an old, wide-spreading oak. I was carrying the bow; and, quick as thought, I fitted an arrow to the string and let go at him. I shot once again as he came at me, tossed the bow away, and drew my dagger. Scarce had I done so when he was upon me, reared upright, snapping and clawing. Twice I dug desperately at him with my short weapon before he reached me with a mighty sweep of his powerful forepaw, ripping away clothing and flesh and knocking me sprawling to the ground. At that instant Martin appeared suddenly behind him and ran his sword to the hilt in the beast's body. The Deer

dragged me away from the bear and took my dagger, which I still clutched in my shaking hand. The bear turned to meet Martin's attack and was taken in the rear by the red man, whose arm rose and fell swiftly, stabbing hard at the hairy back of the animal. At last the brute fell, spouting blood from a dozen wounds.

"This will leave a pretty scar," he said, as he busied himself in dressing my hurt. Later he added, in a dry tone, "You are a lucky cockerel, for the brute did not touch your face. However, we had best rest here a few days, so it may heal properly."

The Deer, in the meantime, investigated the tree which had engaged the attention of the bear, and he now came up to us with a broad smile upon his face. In each hand he carried a large piece of honey. We afterward found that the whole hollow trunk of the tree was filled with it; and this, with the choice portions of the bear, made a fine change of victuals for us, after the past weeks of venison, birds, and fish.

In a week I felt able to travel again, although my wound gave me great unease. While I lay about the camp I wondered as to the fate of the colonists at Fort Charles; and pondered long upon the mystery of Michel Barre's interest in my affairs. I cudgeled my brains in vain, endeavoring to come at a solution of this problem: to guess that secret to which he had referred. But most of all I wondered if I should ever again set foot in France, incomparable and lovely land of my birth.

I allowed something of this to escape me one evening. Martin laughed softly at my melancholy.

"And so are the great words of the philosophers brought to naught," he said, in a tone of gentle raillery. "Don't you know, my boy, that you are living in a perfect state, man's ideal state, that bliss of perfect freedom of which the sages speak?"

I looked sharply at him to see if he was serious; but a faint twinkle in his eyes reassured me.

"It is true," he went on, "that these wise men have not lived in a state of perfect freedom, which goes to show that we are in reality greater men than they, for we have achieved the state they desire."

And with this he left me, chuckling in his dry fashion, and took himself off.

As the summer advanced, we fared slowly south, and by autumn had reached a land of much sand and red earth, with many broad meadows covered with luxuriant grasses. Following this, we marched day after day, skirting the edges of wide marshes. At times we were sure we could smell a faint odor of the sea. Daily we asked each other where it would all end. The taciturn native who accompanied us knew no more than we, for we had long since passed beyond the haunts of the Santees. Martin's beard and hair had grown long and unkempt, and I, to my great delight, also had a respectable growth of hair upon my face. And so, hairy and ragged vagabonds with our entire possessions upon our backs, we wandered in that limitless wilderness.

One day we camped near a broad, sluggish stream between two wide marshes. Again we were among the bearded trees and distorted growths of the jungle.

The Deer was pleased with his familiar surroundings. Martin and I, however, longed to be back once more in that fragrant air, among the clear streams, where we had felt comparatively safe.

And there, in that dark glade, came to us that same chief who had greeted Jean Ribault upon the occasion of our landing at the Rivière de Mai. I recognized him at once and pronounced his name, "Satouriona." He replied by repeating "Ami! Ami!" many times. I realized then that we were again beside the great river where first we had set foot upon the New World, and for some reason I felt immensely comforted.

So again we took up our life among the red men; fell naturally into the routine of hunting and fishing; began all over again the task of learning a new tongue, the language of this tribe, who were called Criques. Their manner of life resembled that of the Santees, but they were a much more powerful people. Their towns were numerous and prosperous, their fields many and large.

Our life for several months was unbroken by any adventure worth relating. We hunted and fished day after day in this verdant country, where winter was milder than the summers of other lands. We made long journeys in caneus through the network of streams that spread through the marshes. We stood high in the graces of Satouriona, the chief. He bestowed upon me the name of "Nutcha," which means in their language the Hawk, for my swiftness in the chase; upon Martin Belcastel that of "Chonga," the Wolf, for his prowess in battle. The Deer had told

well the story of the attack upon the Santee village.

But I rebelled bitterly against the tranquillity of our life, longed for France, complained until Martin was forced to remonstrate with me. But I noticed with amusement, that whenever I proposed an expedition to the sea, in the feeble hope of seeing a rescuing ship, Martin accompanied me with great cheerfulness. So we revisited the glade where stood the stone post carved with the arms of France; haunted the white beaches; plied our paddles hopefully upon the wide reaches of the dark river. But weeks rolled into months; winter into spring; and hope died slowly in our hearts.

BOOK THREE

THE MERCY OF PEDRO MENENDEZ

X

AMI! AMI!

Fifteen leagues separated Satouriona's village from the sea — fifteen leagues of river, black where it crawled through the dim obscurity of the swamps among the knotted, misshapen trees, under the unnatural green of their heavy foliage, dull brown where it loitered in the sunlight through the dreary expanses of salt marsh. That stretch of river became as familiar to us as his dooryard to a householder. Twice each day a strong tide rushed up the river and twice ebbed away, uncovering the crawling things that lived in the black mud of the river bottom. As the chance of rescue faded in our minds, that dim spark of hope which burns forever in man's heart refused to die; we frequented the river more than ever, straining our eyes to the eastward as soon as we came within sight of the sea, but we returned, dejected and downcast, to the village of the Criques.

So we passed our time until Martin's calendar showed it to be June in the year 1564. We had spent two years in the New World.

In late June, on one of these seaward expeditions, and perhaps the space of two leagues from the ocean, I heard an unusual sound, evidently from some distance. A bare sandy hill on the right cut off our view of the next stretch of river. We crept slowly forward. The sound came clearly to me now — it

was the humming of the light breeze through a ship's rigging, the intermittent creak of spars and a low murmur of voices. My heart gave a great bound. A ship meant rescue! I thrust my paddle deep into the water and pulled hard.

"Hold, Blaise!" Martin whispered sharply. "We know not who these men may be. Possibly Spanish or English! You are too impetuous, mon ami! Let us look before we leap."

I nodded soberly, and we resumed our cautious progress. The noise drew steadily nearer and louder; the voices were now plainly audible.

"Let go, mes enfants! Let go!" bawled a stout voice in French. There followed a loud splash as the anchor was cast, the rumble of cable through the hawse holes, and a babble of talk.

Together our paddles dug deep, and the caneu shot out into the river.

There before us floated a stately galleon, blazing like gold in the brilliant rays of the new sun. In the waist of the ship stood a little knot of men in morions and breastplates, and sailors were actively engaged in putting the vessel shipshape. We had almost gained the galleon's side before we were seen.

The group in the waist broke up and came to peer at us over the bulwark, while the sailors stopped their work to stare curiously. Among those crowding the rail I saw the ruddy face and burly form of René de Laudonnière, the haughty features of De Jonville, and other countenances I knew — D'Ully, De Beaudiare, De Lagrange.

As I was about to speak, Martin made me a sign to be silent, and his face assumed a look of complete simplicity. He held up his hand and said, "Ami! Ami!"

De Laudonnière's face broke into a smile and he turned to his companions. "These must be two of the barbarians who greeted us here on the occasion of our first landing," he said, "for they say they are friends."

He turned to look at us once more, and as he looked, a puzzled frown appeared on his brow. "Yes, that is it! They look strangely familiar."

"Have them aboard, monsieur," said a slight man with dark eyes, whom I had never seen before. He carried a large portfolio under his arm, and afterward I learned that his name was LeMoyne, a calligrapher and draughtsman. It was his purpose to make a drawing of these two savages — which, in fact, he did. I have it still at Breault.

In a short time we stood upon the deck among these men, who discussed us freely, unaware of the fact that we understood every word spoken. Laudonnière attempted to converse with Martin by means of signs, but my comrade affected not to understand him, so at last he gave up in despair.

"This appears to be an ignorant and surly barbarian from whom there is nothing to be got," he remarked.

"Nay, monsieur, I think you are wrong there," said Martin in French. "I believe there is more to be learned from these two than from all the other savages in the New World."

There was a moment of astonished silence on the

part of all. Then Laudonnière stepped forward and gazed at Martin intently for some time.

"Martin Belcastel!" he exclaimed. "I can hardly believe it! And young De Breault! Why, you were reported dead — lost in the forest — by the survivors of the first colony." He embraced us with many exclamations of pleasure that we were alive.

"I thought it strange," he remarked later, "that you should have a beard, for I have never seen one of these savages with hair upon his face." There was much merriment over Martin's jest, and they crowded about us examining our clothing and weapons with much interest.

Martin told the story of our life among the barbarians, but made no reference to the events which caused us to leave Fort Charles. As was his wont, he spoke very modestly of his own achievements and enlarged upon mine, until I flushed with embarrassment when Laudonnière felicitated me upon my courage, while De Jonville, that hot-eyed seeker after adventure, bewailed his fate that he had elected to return to France instead of remaining with the colony. When Martin had finished I told them of how he rescued me from the sea, and the story of the bear. He laughed at me, although there was a kind look in his eyes which told that he was secretly pleased.

In return, we heard much of the stirring events that had taken place in France during our absence. They told us of the massacre of the Huguenots at Vassy, but a few days after we had sailed; and how the wars had broken out immediately thereafter with re-

newed ferocity. De Coligny and De Condé had been defeated at Dreux in December 1562, less than a year after our departure. France was still two great armed camps, Catholic against Huguenot, brother against brother, friend opposed to friend; while the Guises and the Queen Mother ruled France with bigoted severity. Admiral de Coligny still cherished his dream of a New France, which explained this fresh adventure into the wilderness under Laudonnière's command; he still clung to his vision of a refuge for his people of the new faith — a safe and happy sanctuary for the persecuted. The Guises had opposed the founding of such a colony, but the sick King, who loved De Coligny so greatly that he had been heard to call him "father," sanctioned the venture and encouraged De Coligny in his schemes. One heartening piece of news we heard was that François de Guise, our archenemy, was dead — his brother Charles, a weak man, was now Duc de Guise.

We learned from Laudonnière of the failure of the first colony; how the survivors, in a leaky vessel of their own construction, starving and despairing, had been picked up at sea by an English ship. Most of them had been set ashore on the French coast, and had afterward reported to Admiral de Coligny that Martin and I had been captured by the red men. Captain Pierra, they said, had died of a bad fever, and the failure of the crops had forced them to leave the island. Martin received this in silence, an example which I deemed it wise to follow.

While we talked two other ships appeared in the

lower reaches of the river and sailed slowly upstream, coming to an anchorage near us. This completed the expedition.

Laudonnière advised with us as to the feasibility of making a settlement upon the Rivière de Mai, and he made us known to those of the company who were strangers to us. The commander was doubtful of the success of an enterprise which lay so close to the dominions of Spain; for all to the south of us lay that land which the Spaniards called "the Floridas," because of endless fields of flowers, of every imaginable hue and color, which greeted the eye of the explorer — that country which the first searchers had taken joyfully for the Isle of Bimini, enchanted and fairy land where sprang the sparkling waters of eternal life, and where they had given up their lives in a vain search for the magic spring. In the end, however, Laudonnière concluded to leave the matter in the hands of the colony itself.

We went ashore and, being joined by others from the rest of the fleet, explored the region close about. Beyond the sand-hill we found a considerable area fit for the growing of crops.

It was then decided, among the leaders, to stop at this place and build homes within an enclosure to be known as Fort Carolin. The work of building such a fort began the next day.

We spoke earnestly to Monsieur de Laudonnière of our desire to return to France upon the first ship. He promised us this boon, but remarked that it would be some time before a vessel would sail for France.

Martin and I were cast down at this intelligence, for we had fondly hoped to be on our way homeward within a month; but much work was needed to make the ships ready again for sea.

The next day Laudonnière proposed to us that we act as his ambassadors to the chief, Satouriona. He wished us to advise the red men of our peaceful intentions and of our reasons for settling upon this new shore; and in Martin he had an envoy worthy to represent the interest of any nation. We undertook this mission with great pleasure, agreeing to perform it and to return within a week.

Satouriona, when we made known to him the arrival of the white men and their pacific intent, assured us of his good will, and sent word to our commander that he would come shortly and welcome the Frenchmen to his country. To us he expressed his sorrow at our wish to leave him, and he made us many fine gifts of feather cloaks and deerskins.

We were gone a week on our mission, as we had promised; and during that time I wondered a great deal as to Martin's reason for concealing the truth concerning the events which had taken place at Fort Charles. I remarked as much and received in return a grim smile, together with the cryptic remark that silence was golden, especially when one knew not the whole situation.

We were returning at the time to the ships, our caneu floating like a pygmy boat on the broad bosom of the dark river among the immensities of the jungle. "We have to remember," Martin went on, his voice

cutting thinly through the primeval stillness about us, "that we still have enemies — one, at least — of whose whereabouts we have no knowledge. A child of the devil, that fat man! In spite of his patch he could see more with that one eye than most men could with two. And a dealer in secrets! Yes, assuredly one to be watched! No doubt this ingenious story of the happenings at Fort Charles originated in Michel Barre's subtle brain."

"Michel Barre is most likely in France, where he cannot bother us much at present," I replied. "He probably thinks us dead."

"Nay," Martin said, "he may be on one of the other vessels. We have seen but few of the members of this expedition."

We said no more; but the unwelcome picture of the fat man with the black patch persisted in my mind for some time.

The afternoon was all but sped when we reached our destination. A pall of white mist hung over the river, through which the gigantic trees thrust upward into the clear air above, as if seeking life in another kingdom. About us we could hear the ring of axes in the forest, the mumble of conversation, and the intermittent cries of men calling to one another in the bloom of the woods. The galleons took form slowly before our eyes, gray phantom ships, floating featherlike on the dull water. When we gained the deck we found it empty, and a search revealed only a single sailor left as a ship's guard. Everyone was ashore, he told us, concerned with the tasks which had

been assigned them. A few women and children were still aboard the other vessels, but that was all.

We found Monsieur de Laudonnière in a small tent on top of the sand-hill, engaged with LeMoyne in working over the plans for the fort. During the rest of the day, after we had reported the result of our embassy, we met many gentlemen who had joined the expedition in the hope of finding a worth-while adventure, or some of the fabulous riches of the New World. They asked if we had succeeded in finding the gold deposits from which the savages drew their supplies; and were rudely skeptical when we told them that the source of the gold and silver ornaments which had attracted them lay many days' journey to the west.

Among these men was that Roger de Merrillac mentioned by Martin Belcastel as a suitor for the hand of the damoiselle Marie de la Costa, a young man of about my own age, with a sneering and unpleasant bearing, who earned my hearty dislike at our very first meeting. Afterward, I had a much stronger reason for that aversion, as you shall hear.

Nor was I surprised when I was presented to a slender, mild-mannered gentleman with white hair, who spoke with great enthusiasm of the new land in which he found himself. This was the Sieur de la Costa, who had come, as Martin had predicted, with his daughter and several retainers, to establish himself in the Floridas. This news delighted me, although I learned with concern that the damoiselle Marie was ill, aboard one of the ships. I looked forward to seeing her once more; but many long days passed ere

I had opportunity to see again that sweet face which had so captivated me.

The work of constructing dwellings and the walls of Fort Carolin went on rapidly, after the wondrous plans and drawings of Monsieur LeMoyne, who had a great cunning with his pencil. In a few days Satouriona made his appearance in our camp, accompanied by a large train of gayly dressed red men, and was kindly received by Monsieur de Laudonnière. Martin acted as interpreter, and a very agreeable feeling existed between the two parties after the meeting was over.

As time went on, our savage friends became frequent visitors at the fort. They were hugely delighted with the hymns and chants sung by the more pious among us; and it was a common sight to see a dozen of these Criques, arms folded across their brawny chests, and feathers nodding gently above their heads, hearkening solemnly to the sonorous choruses of the worshipers. The Deer favored this form of amusement very much; and once I came upon Satouriona, himself, a stately giant, outlined bravely in the light of a full moon, standing at a considerable distance, listening gravely.

Gradually, enough dwellings were completed to house the entire colony and the ships were left tenantless, except for a man or two left on them as guards. With the advent of the women and children, the settlement took on a cheerful aspect of permanency. Martin and I were away from Fort Carolin most of the time, leading hunting parties back into the in-

terior, or arranging with the savages to supply grain for the use of the colonists. Occasionally we rested for a day or two at the fort; and it was during one of these periods of idleness that we received a most unpleasant surprise.

XI

A FAMILIAR FIGURE

We discovered a hairdresser among the various artisans in the colony, a small, wizened fellow with merry, impudent eyes, who made us most brave again with his shears, and enjoyed greatly my solicitude over my moustaches. I looked haughtily at him, but this only served to make him laugh outright, which put me in a huff. Martin's face remained sober; but there was so mirthful a twinkle in his eyes that I laughed in spite of myself. The hairdresser proved to be a decent fellow, after all, for he told us of a tailor who had with him the tools of his trade and a few bolts of good cloth with which he hoped to turn an honest penny. We sought the man out and he bargained to make for Martin a suit of plain blue; for me, one of scarlet serge, a choice which caused Martin to remark that the Scarlet Cockerel was about to resume his feathers.

As we came into the broad parade-ground in the centre of the fort, after leaving the tailor, my eyes fell upon a familiar and unwelcome sight. Crossing the open toward us was that fat, that ironic, that sinister rascal with the black patch over his eye — Michel Barre!

He moved with that lightness which never ceased

to surprise me; and when he was come up to us, he bowed very low, as was his custom.

"Ah, messieurs! It delights me to see you again, alive and well," he said, with a glimmer of a smile about his thick lips.

"Doubtless," answered Martin, dryly.

I said nothing, for the very sight of the man made me uneasy, filled me with repulsion.

"I have suffered much hardship since last I saw you," the fat man continued. "After the death of our good captain — "

"Of a fever," Martin put in, softly.

"Of a sudden fever," Barre agreed, ironically, "and you gentlemen had left the island — "

"Carried off by the savages, was it not?" asked Martin, with an unmoved face.

"I believe it was so reported," said the big man, glancing at Martin with a gleam of reluctant admiration in his eye. "After these events had taken place, having no illustrious captain to lead us," — a shadow passed across his swarthy countenance, — "we built a vessel as best we could, and sailed in it for France. But we were unable to provision the ship properly, owing to the enmity of the savages, with whom we had some disagreement; and before we had been at sea many days we were in desperate circumstances. Mon Dieu! I lived upon my fat for many days, like certain animals of which a monk did tell me when a boy. I lost much flesh and was scarcely more than a skeleton when we were saved by an English ship."

"You have recovered nobly," commented Martin,

running an appraising eye over the rotund form in front of him.

"Ah, yes, messieurs! But it was terrible! And I feared much for your safety, messieurs — "

"Having so great admiration for my father," I put in maliciously.

He bowed again.

"And when you arrived in France?" Martin prompted him.

"Then I reported to Admiral de Coligny the failure of the colony and the sad death of Captain Pierra — by fever, a sudden fever." There was a satisfied smirk upon his face as he added, simply, "The truth would have cost me my head. As it is, I was sent upon this venture because of my experience with the first."

"The real story might be told at any time, Master Barre, — had you thought of that? — At any time, perhaps at a most inopportune moment," said Martin. "Who knows?"

The fat man shrugged his sloping shoulders deprecatingly. "Who knows, indeed? 'Tis a thing to be guarded against," he admitted, and took leave of us.

Martin and I continued on our way to Laudonnière's house, to take his commands with regard to us. As we walked, the supreme impudence of that man rankled in my mind, and the old uneasiness came back upon me, as I reflected that a constant guard and watch was necessary again, since Michel Barre's return. Martin said something of this to me as we went along.

Monsieur de Laudonnière we found in a bad humor, with a dark frown on his usually pleasant features. However, he brightened when he saw us, and greeted us with a smile.

"My two savages!" he cried. "Just the men I wanted to see! I have a commission for you. Five of our tender sprigs of nobility have banded themselves together and tripped blithely off into the forest to search for gold. As if gold grew on trees! Four days they have been gone, and it is like enough they are lost. I would that you try to find them."

" 'Tis no small matter," I remarked. "Like finding a flea on a dog's back! Which way have they taken, Monsieur le Capitaine, could you perhaps tell us that?"

"To the southward, I think," he replied. "They have doubtless lost themselves in the great morass which lies in that quarter. Mayhap they are dead of the fever by now. As if there were not enough sickness among us, so that the surgeon can scarce take care of it! And the work lagging, no crops planted — Faith, 'tis enough to drive one mad."

"Well, that was to be expected, monsieur," said Martin, thoughtfully. "These young gentlemen of France, these roystering blades, are no colonists. They came for the adventure, gold-fever in their blood: for the chance of a tilt with the unknown. They push on before the colonists, such men as these, looking for something over the hill, beyond the blue horizon. Monsieur, why should we not make a journey into the interior — you and the boy and I? Who

knows what we should find? New lands for France?"

At these words there came upon Laudonnière's face an eager and shining expression: the look of the quester who sees the quest before him.

"It might be — " he began, then broke off short to look at Martin with a questioning eye.

That banterer was smiling broadly. The captain broke into a roar of laughter.

"It seems that you are teaching me a lesson, eh, Monsieur Belcastel? Well, be off with you! We will not be too hard with these young men — if we find them, eh? — since we are all cut off the same pattern."

We left him and set out upon our search. By good fortune we discovered them on the second day, wet, miserable, shaking with chills, burning with fever; and on the fourth day we had them safely back in Fort Carolin. Laudonnière was greatly pleased; called it a feat, and made us so many compliments that I went about for some days feeling very proud of myself, much to Martin's amusement. He twitted me about it, but I cared naught for that. Praise from René de Laudonnière was high praise indeed — almost as much to be desired as though it came from Martin Belcastel.

It was not until the second day after our return that I saw a woman approaching me. Could it be — ? She came nearer, and a great thrill ran over me. I was gazing straight into the lovely brown eyes of the lady of the Paris garden.

"Ah, mademoiselle! I feared I had lost you — should never see you again," I blurted out, before I could gather my scattered wits.

She hesitated and looked at me inquiringly. A rosy color came upon her pale face, as she realized the import of my words. An impudent fellow she must have thought me, in my deerskins which showed evidence of such hard usage, with no hat to doff, sunbrowned and unkempt, staring at her so greedily. Mordieu! A mannerless and low-bred clown I looked, without doubt.

"Monsieur must be mistaken," she said coldly, drawing away from me. "I have never seen him before!"

"Nay, but I have seen you, mademoiselle, two years ago in a garden in Paris. I have never forgotten you!" I was determined now to go on with it. "I shall never forget," I added.

She smiled a little at this, blushingly, and turned to leave me. This cast me down exceedingly, but I could think of nothing more to say. I cursed myself for a witless fool with a blundering tongue: a fool — nothing more — who had ruined his chances. She had taken a slow step or two when I heard a new voice at my elbow, and looked up to see the Sieur de la Costa.

"Monsieur de Breault," he said, bowing, "I did not know that my daughter had the pleasure of your acquaintance. Her illness — "

"Nay, father, I do not know the young man," said the girl, turning back to face us. "I did but inquire the way of him to Roger de Merrillac's house. I am taking him a broth to strengthen him during his sickness."

This ready invention, and the dazzling smile which

accompanied it, struck me dumb, so I said nothing at all.

"This is Monsieur de Breault, my dear," said Monsieur de la Costa, after a puzzled glance at each of us in turn, — I bowed, — "one of the two gentlemen who had the strange and wondrous adventures of which I told you. They have lived for many months among the wild inhabitants of this country. I have wanted much to ask you about the soil, monsieur. It would be a great favor if you would come to my house, at your leisure, so that we may discuss the wonders of this new land."

"I shall be honored to be of service to you, monsieur," I replied. "If you will but name a time I shall be pleased to come. 'Twould be well, I think, to bring Monsieur Belcastel, since he has a greater knowledge than I of these things."

And so evening found Martin and me at the home of the Sieur de la Costa, brave in our new clothes, which we had hastened to get from the tailor. The master of the house proved to be a man of many words, who talked at great length on the fecundity of the soil, its ingredients and properties, informing us of his far-reaching plans for setting up an estate in this wilderness; of how he would bring blackamoors from the little-known land of Africa to till the soil; and many other things he spoke of with many words and much bombast. Aye, had it not been for the sweet loveliness of the daughter, I had left long ere I did. She accorded me such kindly treatment, however, that I was fain to believe that my boldness of the after-

noon had not been so unwelcome as I feared. Before we had been there long, I left to Martin — much to his disgust — the task of explaining to our host the resources of the New World, while I conversed with the fair lady of the garden.

One thing I discovered that was not at all to my taste — the name of Roger de Merrillac was much upon her lips. My dislike of that sneering and unpleasant young man deepened accordingly.

I remarked to Martin, as we strolled back to our quarters under a sky brilliant with stars, that I had spent a very pleasant evening. He chuckled.

"So you did, Blaise; but consider me," he replied, with mock seriousness. "I am so filled up with soils, rainfalls, blackamoors, crops, estates, and the general superiority of the Sieur de la Costa to the rest of the poor humans hereabout, that I can scarce stagger under the weight of my knowledge. I may now say without boast that I am a brave man, for I have stood up this night against such a blast of words as would have beat down any but the noblest courage. Faith! 'tis beyond the comprehension! Prodigious!"

I burst out laughing.

"After all, 'tis no matter for laughter," Martin said, seriously. I glanced at his face, dim in the light of the stars; it bore the shadow of a great weariness.

"This man is a vast wind that blows nowhere, a huge tun of words," he continued, after a short silence. " 'Tis not such as the Sieur de la Costa that will conquer this hard land. No! Nor these young swordsmen who are following a dream. Where are the hus-

bandmen, Blaise, to break this virgin soil? Those patient toilers — the backbone of France, where are they?"

"Then you think this colony will fail, like the other?" I asked.

"What else? Look at this fort, half-completed; no crops; no land cleared. And we search for gold-hunters in the forest. Gold! And no gold within five hundred leagues. The only gold to be gained here lies beneath our feet, in the products of the soil."

I shrugged my shoulders. Martin laughed.

"But life goes on, eh? And Blaise de Breault has other things to vex his mind? The women are the very devil to plague a man," said Martin.

As the days passed, I became a constant visitor at the house of De la Costa. I became agile in evading the vaporings of the father, and strolled much about the fort with the daughter. When I was not with her, she was ever in my thoughts. And so went many happy days until Roger de Merrillac had recovered of his fever and was able once more to be about.

I saw that he was much in her mind; and I saw, too, with a bitter glee, that he was not sure of her, although he ruffled it bravely enough before me. Aye, this haughty and arrogant young man was struck to the heart with love of her; but she put him off. I was not without hope, for it seemed, at times, that she turned more and more to me. But there were hours and days when the proud lady bestowed her favor upon De Merrillac, and I sulked, disheartened and uncertain, in my quarters.

Soon the hot months of summer came to their end and autumn was all about us. Then came the rains, heavy downpourings from gray, cheerless skies, and Fort Carolin soon became an island on its sandy hilltop, surrounded by a sea of mud and water. We were confined to our houses for a long period; and the enforced inactivity sharpened our tempers and our tongues. Martin alone remained his usual calm self; spent his time in practice at arms or in peaceful slumber, from which he awoke refreshed and cheerful. But I had not his philosophic temperament. I paced the room for hours, raging at the inaction, or went slipping and sliding in the vile mud about the fort, seeking for diversion. Michel Barre I saw but seldom and I had no speech of him, but each sight of him caused my mind to take up in vain the attempt to guess the cause of his interest in me.

Autumn came and went, melting into a sunny winter.

XII

HOPES AND FEARS

And with the advent of winter many troubles came upon us.

In January, René de Laudonnière called together some of the cooler heads among the colonists and took counsel with them. Martin and I were especially asked to be present, because of our knowledge of the country and our acquaintance with the savages. When we had assembled at the commander's house, Monsieur de Laudonnière spoke to us in a friendly way, telling us much of the inner workings of the colony.

"Messieurs," he said, "things are not well with us. As you know, despite my best efforts no crops have been planted; men are indifferent to the general welfare and seek only their own personal gain. It is only a fool who cannot see that in such a venture as this the success of all means the success of each."

He paused and paced twice the length of the room, pulling fiercely at his beard; then he turned to us a face flushed and angry.

"I have been charged by the more pious members of our expeditions," he went on, sarcastically, "with being indifferent to our faith; and yet, there are few who have given more for their faith than I. Short of

my life, messieurs, I have given everything; but I have yet to see ground ploughed by prayer or a harvest garnered by the singing of a hymn. I have been reproached because there is no pastor with the flock. All in good time, say I, when there is a certainty that the colony is to be a success. The young men are in an ill humor because I have forbidden them to hunt for gold. Some person has been spreading anew the tale of gold to be had for the taking in the interior, and it is believed, my friends, it is believed, despite the word of two honest gentlemen that no gold exists in this vicinity. And while we bicker over these matters famine has come upon us. Our supplies are almost exhausted. It is true that Monsieur Ribault is to come with ships and men; but we cannot expect him for several months. In the meantime, messieurs, what shall we do?"

Then arose a loud babble of voices, all trying to talk at one time, and advice, mostly of small account. I said nothing. Martin sat beside me, wordless.

There were many suggestions: that we all embark on the vessels and return to France; that a ship be sent for assistance; that the colony be placed under strict military rule; and others of less value. When all had fallen silent, Laudonnière turned to Martin with a grim face and asked his counsel.

"The streams are alive with fish," Martin began quietly, "but only a few of us catch them. The forest is full of game, but no one hunts. 'Tis now too late for hunting alone to support us; we must purchase food from the red men — if we can. Monsieur de Breault

and I will go on the morrow and see what can be done, if that is agreeable to the company."

And so it was arranged.

We set out the next day at sunrise and came, in the late evening, to the home of Satouriona on the little tributary of the Rivière de Mai. We slept in the house of the chieftain, but, as was the way of those people, said nothing of the reason for our visit until next morning, when in due form we stated to Satouriona the object of our errand. He listened with great attention to what we said and promised to call the sub-chiefs to the council that night. He wished his French brothers to wait with patience in his house, and at the council an answer would be given them to carry back to the Great Chief with the Hairy Face — which was the name the barbarians had for Laudonnière.

Messengers were sent out at once, and through the rest of the day the smaller chiefs straggled in at the call of their king. That day we spent in renewing our acquaintances with the inhabitants of the village, and we spent much time also with our old friend, the Deer.

When night had fallen we went to the council-house. In its gloomy interior a fire burned. On one side sat Satouriona, with his chiefs ranged on either side of him; on the other, Martin and I took our places, facing them. For a long time we sat in silence, while the tobacco-pipe of peace passed from hand to hand until it reached us. The fitful firelight illuminated with flickering gleams the expressionless bronze faces of the barbarians and brightened the bark walls, black-

ened by the smoke of many fires. Then Satouriona stood up and spoke at length, setting forth the desires of the white men.

After he had finished and taken his seat, the sub-chiefs stood forth, one by one, and gave their opinions — some at great length, others in a few words. As the night moved on, the fire became a mass of red embers, lighting with murky radiance the impassive faces of the savage warriors; a pall of smoke hung motionless in the shadowy space above our heads; and the profound silence was broken only by the guttural voices of the speakers. When Satouriona arose to announce to us the decision of the council, his tall form reached high into the smoke-cloud that by now filled the upper part of the chamber, like a giant with his head among the clouds, and his measured words came down to us like the muttered thunder from the obscurity of the heavens. It was strangely impressive.

"Friends," he said, "since there is peace between your people and mine, and since you are in want, we shall send what food we can spare. I have taken counsel with the chiefs of my people, and this is their answer: When the second sun shall come, we will be ready. I have said."

And with that these children of the wild wrapped their feather mantles about them and strode forth from the council-house.

So we abode another day in the house of this kindly chieftain, who showed himself more a real king than many who reached to a greater fame. At sunrise of the day following we took our way homeward, the first

of fifty caneus deep-laden with food for Fort Carolin. We were received with great rejoicing by the colonists, and many were the gifts the red men carried back in payment to their villages: knives and mirrors and good red cloth, which they prized greatly.

Monsieur de Laudonnière commended us highly for our diplomacy; but Martin disclaimed all credit for our success, assuring the commandant that these supplies of food were the result of the benevolence of Satouriona and his kindred, rather than of any merit on our part. But Laudonnière persisted in his opinion, and he praised us thereafter whenever chance afforded.

Winter ended at last, and spring found me still upon this alien shore. Aye, messieurs, I had need to stay now, even if I could have gone, for Marie de la Costa still coquetted with Roger de Merrillac and with me, bestowing her smiles first upon one and then upon the other. She gave us no peace. But it was a sweet misery!

Spring wore into early summer. It was now the season when we might expect Jean Ribault, and we kept a sharp lookout. Supplies were low again and there was suffering at Fort Carolin. The more devout people charged all these troubles to Laudonnière's impiety, for he gave no attention to the Sabbath day and paid no heed to the reproaches of the pious. He bent all his energy to the slow work of clearing the land and completing the walls of the fortification — truly a disheartening task!

But there was an ever-growing discontent. Two of

the three vessels still in the river were ready for sea, and there was talk of returning to France. Many were disappointed, and spoke sourly of being cozened by fair words and false promises. Where was the "land that floweth with milk and honey," which had been described to them? Where was Jean Ribault, with his ships and supplies? Only madmen would live in this land where there was no gold to be had — nor even food! So ran the talk.

And then an evil thing befell us. Some of the sailors and young men seized the larger vessel in the harbor, cast the ship's guards overboard with scant ceremony, and put to sea at dawn. The two men made their way ashore, in great fright at the monsters of the river, and, breathless and spent, arrived at the fort just at sunrise. From the talk among the ships' crews, these guards gave it as their opinion that the men intended to turn pirates under the leadership of De Jonville, that hot-headed seeker of hazards, and prey upon the gold-ships of Spain among the islands.

Now the colony was surely in a bad situation. Food was growing scarcer each day, but no retreat was possible. The small caravel left in the harbor was incapable of carrying all the colonists back to France, and, besides, she needed much work to make her seaworthy. An effort was made to tend the few little fields of growing crops, while anxious eyes scanned each day the rolling expanse of the sea in search of the welcome sails of Ribault's vessels, which meant relief. But day succeeded day, and still the waters remained empty of life. The faces of the colonists

grew more frightened and gloomy as time passed. Among us all there was but one man who spoke confidently of the future. Monsieur de la Costa still went among us, talking at length of his plans and schemes to all who would listen, but he was much alone, for his fellows were in no mood to listen to the praises of a land which had received them — they felt — so inhospitably. As is ever the way, they laid the blame everywhere but upon themselves, where it really belonged.

One afternoon I wandered away from the fort toward the river. I was sick of the sad faces and the suffering; of the sharp tongues with their never-ending complaints.

Near the river I left the beaten path, to pace for a time in a narrow glade among the trees, and finally sat upon the trunk of a fallen tree. There was a hum of insects in the air, a flash now and then of bright-hued birds in the deep shade of the woods. Shadows deepened as the sun went slowly down. There was a drowsy peace over everything.

After a while I caught the low murmur of voices, and saw, walking along the path, Marie de la Costa and Roger de Merrillac. They spoke in subdued voices, so I heard no words; but her eyes flashed angrily, and De Merrillac's face was dark with rage. I guessed, with joy, that his wooing went no smoother than mine.

Hardly had they disappeared, when I heard a faint cry from the direction in which they had gone. I jumped up and ran as fast as I could toward the

sound. When I burst from a thicket into the open, I saw Marie struggling with De Merrillac. He held her by her slender wrists; and although she had pulled away from him as far as she could, she was helpless in his strong grasp. Her gentle face was drawn with fear, but when she saw me, a look of relief came into her eyes. De Merrillac was talking rapidly, and as I drew near I caught the import of his words.

"You shall marry me!" I heard, as I came up, "and that quickly! I'm tired of your coy ways, my sweeting. I have your father's sanction — aye, and your uncle's, the head of your house."

"I'll never marry you, Roger de Merrillae," she cried, striving to release her hands. "I hate you! I hate you!"

"Take your hands from the lady, you hound!" I said. I was cool enough outwardly, but my heart was seething with fury.

He dropped her hands so suddenly that she almost fell, and turned to face me.

"Who made you her protector, you Gascon beggar?" he cried, drawing his sword. "I shall have to teach you a lesson in manners."

"Nay, you are but a fool, sir," I informed him. "In my family we do not fight before ladies. The matter is arranged in a quite different way."

"You are right," he replied, bringing his rage under control. "I shall have the pleasure of sending a friend to call upon you this evening."

I bowed. He turned upon his heel and walked rapidly off toward the fort.

I turned then to Marie. The look of fear had come back again into her eyes.

"Blaise — Monsieur de Breault — you must not fight him," she exclaimed, in a beseeching voice, before I could speak. "He is — "

I took this to be solicitude for my enemy — aye, I thought she feared for his life, and my heart grew heavy in my breast. I answered her coldly.

"Have no fear for your lover, Mademoiselle. I shall not kill him, but merely teach him a lesson in manners. He stands sadly in need of it, as you know better than I."

At this she started to speak, but did not. We took our way back to Fort Carolin. It was not until we had almost reached her house that she broke the silence.

"How I hate all men!" she said; and she went within, leaving me standing at the doorstep in a maze, for I thought this but poor payment for rescuing her from an unpleasant situation.

That night, after my return to quarters, a young man of good blood, one Norman de Pompierres, called upon me on behalf of De Merrillac. I referred him to Martin Belcastel. Between them they arranged for us to fight the second morning thereafter.

As soon as De Pompierres had left, Martin turned to me. "What is the cause of this quarrel, Blaise?" he asked.

"We disagreed on a question of manners, Martin," I answered, laughing.

"Which may mean anything. I take it you are

fighting over a woman. But it is right well said, my boy," he observed.

De Merrillac, I discovered when we fought, had a strong and supple wrist, a fair trick of fence for a school-taught man, but, with the new style of play Martin had taught me, he was like a child in my hands. We had scarce engaged until I began to press him hotly and in a short time had wounded him in the left arm. He insisted upon continuing; in three passes I disarmed him. He stood and waited quietly for my next movement. He was no coward. I bowed to him and left the field.

I left behind me an enemy more bitter than before, for he felt that he owed me the obligation of sparing his life, since it was my privilege to kill him if I had so desired.

XIII

MINE ENEMIES

After that morning, life at Fort Carolin dragged on as usual. The supplies of food obtained from the natives had been consumed, and no more were forthcoming, for the villages were stripped bare. Laudonnière was at his wit's end; there was talk of laying the keels of two vessels to take the colony back to France. Many had given up all hope of Jean Ribault's return and resigned themselves to make the best of it, but others searched the sea each day with hopeful eyes. July came upon us, with all its scorching heat, and still the ocean rolled before us blue and vacant.

I saw Michel Barre, at times, about the settlement, and he saluted me with his customary excess of politeness. He had, I decided, given up his mysterious plans. And yet, each time I caught the satiric gleam of that nimble eye I had a quickened sense of danger. I admitted as much to Martin, one night at bedtime.

"Your feelings serve you better than your mind, I think," he observed, thoughtfully. "Michel Barre, if I have read him aright, is not the man to give up his schemes so easily; but he must move slowly. He is alone now, and single-handed is no match for us."

"Nay, nor double-handed," I replied. "'Twould be no trick to kill him. Child's play!"

"There spoke the Scarlet Cockerel," said Martin,

in a severe tone, "without thought or judgment! Can you not see that this is no common man — this fat fellow? He has had such a bout with life as has taught him much, I'll wager. He is an enemy to be respected."

"Well, the Scarlet Cockerel will live just so long as it is written," I said cheerfully, "in spite of all the fat men on earth. And I still think — regardless of your doubts, Martin! — that I could kill two like our polite friend and with the greatest ease."

"Perhaps," he said. "But he moves quickly for such a barrel of a man."

"Oh, 'tis not he that I fear," I remarked, "but his trickeries and subtleties. Mordieu! A man must guard against such! But what is his interest in my affairs? What does he want? That is beyond me."

"I have thought, sometimes, perhaps it was some old quarrel of your father's which he has bequeathed you, along with the sword you bear. Gervaise had a heavy hand and he made many enemies." Martin yawned.

I meditated upon this, and it seemed reasonable enough, after I had thought it over.

"At least we owe Monsieur Barre our thanks for one thing," Martin remarked later; "he has saved us much ennui. This is no place for men of the sword. I fear we are missing much in France. A fair, sweet land, this — but dull." He yawned again.

"I have hopes," I answered.

"Oh, hopes?" said Martin. "For that matter, I have a certainty before me. Something is coming,

what, I don't know — but something. My sword hand is itching as it did before Siena, and half a dozen other times before hot fighting. I shall run a great hazard soon."

"Then I shall stick to you like a brother," I told him; and I went to sleep happy, for I had faith in Martin.

After that there were many strange happenings that aroused my interest in Michel Barre to a new pitch. One night we were called by Laudonnière to consult with him anew upon the advisability of abandoning the colony and returning to France. The Sieur de la Costa was there, a willing talker — much to Martin's disgust; De Beaudiarre, gruff and positive; Le Moyne, handsome, open, believing always in good fortune; and others. There was more talk of laying keels and building vessels; more conjecture as to the likelihood of Jean Ribault's return; a deal of idle argument which benefited no one. The pale light of candles flickered on the rough walls and serious faces, on Laudonnière's drawn features and weary eyes, on Martin's impassive countenance. As was his wont, Martin said little. I said nothing at all.

To tell the truth, I had no patience with these meetings, which were no longer novel or interesting, since they only served as a place to air the complaints of a body of men who had ingloriously failed; so I sat indifferent to the wrangling voices around me, with my eyes fixed absently on the dark window above Monsieur de Laudonnière's head. After a time, it seemed to me that I could distinguish in that dark

space the shadowy outline of a head, covered with a broad, drooping hat. I shut my eyes for a moment, then looked again. The phantom shape was still there. Now I could trace the dim outline of a cheek, catch the furtive gleam of an eye.

I sat erect, wondering, and stared hard at the window. It was empty!

This was puzzling, and set me to casting around in my mind for the identity of this peeper. I had a vague sense of something familiar about that head, seen so imperfectly in the night. I could not be sure, but I felt that it was Michel Barre who had spied upon us; and although I scoffed at the idea, I could not rid my mind of the conviction. All my perplexities, which had to do with the designs of that subtle, fat fellow, crowded back upon me with renewed life.

Some time afterward a soldier named Mathias Mallon came up to me one day in the parade ground and asked me quietly to walk along beside him. He had a communication of a private nature to make to me. I had been of some slight service to him during the days of the first colony. A slender, swarthy man, he had an erect figure, dry, grizzled hair, and a still habit. He found it difficult to speak and we strolled in silence for some time.

"It appears," he said in a low voice, after considerable thought, "that you have two very pretty enemies here, Monsieur de Breault."

I looked at him inquiringly.

"You have had the misfortune to offend Michel Barre in some way. And that is truly a misfortune,

monsieur! He is not a man to be trifled with; I have reason to know. Also you have gained the hatred of the young Sieur de Merrillac."

"I have known this for some time, but I thank you nevertheless, Monsieur Mallon, for your warning." I laughed. "A threatened man lives long."

He looked at me soberly and shook his head. "Apparently you do not know Michel Barre. Did you also know that these two have joined together to make common cause against you?"

This startled me. I assured him that this was news to me.

"I discovered it by overhearing — quite by accident — a conversation between them last night. Their reasons for this enmity," he went on, "I was unable to learn; but they have the most evil intentions regarding you. I thought it best to put you on your guard. Barre is a crafty man, — the other will be but a tool in his hands, — and apparently has not told De Merrillac as much as he learned. So I was not able to learn what his plans are. But watch behind you, monsieur! Guard your back!"

I thanked him again and we parted in mutual good will.

Martin had little comment to make on this news, except to say it was a possibility that had occurred to him several times, but it changed the situation not a whit. We could only sit still and wait for our friend, the enemy, to move.

"Evil," he continued, "draws men together more quickly than good. Guilt holds them. The only truly

fearless man is he who has a clear conscience and has always dealt honestly with his fellows."

This was an illuminating observation, it seemed to me. I perceived that the evil in the hearts of these two men, so unlike, had banded them together against me. But such an alliance, I felt, had small chance to overturn the union of Belcastel and De Breault, founded, as it was, upon a profound affection, a loyalty never dismayed.

The second day after my talk with Mallon his remarks were seemingly confirmed, for I came upon the two supposed conspirators in earnest consultation, near one of the unfinished bastions of Fort Carolin. When they saw me, De Merrillac gave a great start and walked away without a word, while Michel Barre followed the retreating form with a baleful glare in his eye. Then he turned to me and bowed with his usual deference, inquiring smoothly after my health.

"It seems that you are a friend to Monsieur de Merrillac," I began, paying his politeness scant attention.

"An acquaintance, merely," he replied, after an appraising glance in my direction. "It appears that he has learned that I was at Siena, where his father died so bravely in the hottest of the fighting, and he wished to hear if I could add anything to the story of his sire's death. Unfortunately, I could not; but the young man seems to have a passion for tales of valor."

"And so he has come to you to hear of valiant deeds, eh?" I interrupted the garrulous flow of words be-

hind which this stout rascal hid himself. "A wise choice, truly!"

He cast an oblique glance in my direction, remarked with dignity that his life had been spent in the company of brave men, in observing the actions of such, and he felt himself well able to speak of them; in fact, he had promised to do that very thing for the Sieur de Merrillac, who had such a liking for these tales.

I laughed in my sleeve at the cleverness of the man in preparing the ground for future conversations with his fellow-plotter by so plausible an excuse. I smiled and an expression of surprised inquiry appeared in his eye. At that I laughed; and I walked on still laughing, leaving him standing there staring after me, bewildered and angry beyond any doubt.

A few hours later Martin and I took to the forest, our refuge from the sour faces and capricious tempers of our companions at Fort Carolin. We proceeded some leagues up the river in our caneu and landed in the hope of taking some game; but we beat the woods for a long time without success.

Toward evening a strong wind came upon us. It rushed unexpectedly out of the heavens, and on the instant the forest became a place of terror. The lofty trees rocked and swayed above us in a terrifying manner; the air was filled with the noise of cracking wood, the crash of falling trees, the tearing, rending sound of huge limbs torn apart. Martin shouted at me, but I was unable to hear, although his lips were fairly against my ear. In the thunderous howl of the storm speech was impossible. He pointed then to the river,

and I began to move in that direction as best I could against the great power of the wind. The sky became overcast with sable clouds; in the half-light of the forest I stumbled along, making poor progress. When I had gone some distance in this way, I looked behind me for Martin; and saw that which caused my heart to stand still in my breast: a tall tree was leaning slowly to its fall — it hung a moment in air, as though controlled by a mighty hand — it rushed downward, faster and faster. Martin Belcastel stood fairly in its path!

I shouted in vain — the puny sound was snatched from my lips and blown away in a twinkling. Martin's head was bent against the force of the wind and he knew nothing of the danger so close above him. Just as I had lost all hope, he looked up and saw his perilous position — too late. He bounded forward, but the gigantic tree, falling now like lightning, reached out with its topmost branches and struck him down. Martin disappeared under a mass of foliage.

A cry of horror died on my lips. Among the leaves that covered my comrade there was no movement except that made by the wind.

XIV

CAPTAIN JOHN HAWKINS

I stood for a moment rooted to the spot. A hard lump came in my throat and near throttled me; I was blind with tears, for I could not believe that Martin still lived. Then I rushed into the foliage of the fallen tree and tore madly at the branches until I could see his still form, face downward among the leaves. Blood ran slowly from a deep cut in his head, and trickled in a thin stream across a cheek gone white. I shook with fear for him, as I dragged him out. With grievous labor, I raised him upon my shoulders and staggered away to an open space near the river. Examination disclosed nothing but the wound in his head, and I hastened to the river for water to revive him. The wind roared more loudly than ever through the forest; the river was whipped and harried to a foamy fury, and banks of black clouds now completely obscured the heavens.

As I ran back from the stream, the first heavy, wind-driven drops of rain stung my face, and the wind screamed among the trees with a high singing note that was terrific. And then came the deluge. In the wink of an eye I was beaten to my knees, drenched to the skin. I crawled the short distance to Martin's side, scarce able to breathe in the furious drive of the air about me. The earth trembled with

the fall of huge trees, and there was a constant crashing and crackling of riven wood in the forest on all sides of us. I had indeed done wisely in seeking the open.

When I reached Martin I found him sitting upright, though swaying with giddiness.

"Mordieu — I was gathering myself up to go and search for you," he said. His voice was weak but cool. "I thought you had been struck down — killed, mayhap — or pinned beneath a tree."

"Thank the good God! You are alive!" I cried, overjoyed. "I feared you were dead. I went to get water and the rain overtook me ere I could return."

"My head thumps most damnably!" he replied, "and I am sore bruised, but no bones are broken, I think. Corbleu! I am a lucky one! One more step and I had got clear. As it is, the damage is little and I count myself fortunate to have escaped at all."

The storm raged for hours. Night had long since fallen when the wind died and the rain ceased, but stars were shining when we took our way through the dripping and battered woods to the caneu. It was near another day when we entered Fort Carolin, satisfied the demands of a sleepy sentry, and went to our quarters. As I stripped off my soaked clothing, I remarked to Martin that this was not so dull a country as we had feared — this New World. Martin laughed and fingered his sore head gingerly.

"Well, no — not so dull. Still 'tis no pleasure for a man to fight the elements. If he escapes — think of this now — 'tis only because le bon Dieu has be-

friended him, not because he has a quicker eye or a superior wit. But when it is man to man — then our gracious Lord, I believe, takes no notice. Then 'tis wrist opposed to wrist, skill against skill, and the Devil take the last one. The odds are even; and to the man who makes the best use of the talents God has given him falls the victory. Such an adventure as this simply goes to show, to my mind, that a higher Power than ours has evened the odds."

"But, Martin, the Scriptures tell us that God, from His high throne, sees even the sparrow's fall."

"Aye, but men are different," Martin said slowly. "God dwells in each one of us, I think."

"Well, I know not," I said, "but this seems to be a good creed you have made for yourself — good, at least, for a fighting man."

"It satisfies me," said Martin simply.

That ended the conversation, for I fell asleep promptly, and awoke to find around me a bright and sunlit world.

This was to be a great day at Fort Carolin, although we knew it not when we arose and set forth from our quarters.

At noon, as we were coming through the south gate of the fort, we became aware of a great shouting and clatter of excited speech. The whole colony was moving about; the gloomy faces of yesterday were cheerful and happy; smiles replaced the scowls, and a loud gabble of voices the dismal silence of the morning. We made haste to learn the cause of this change, and it was as I suspected.

Ships had been sighted! Five sail, we were told, should make the harbor that afternoon if the wind held. Mordieu! Here was famous news! My spirits rose in a bound, and even Martin's well-schooled face showed a gleam of animation.

"Let us be among the first to greet them, Blaise," he said, with one of his rare and charming smiles. "This is an occasion! No doubt 'tis Jean Ribault, at last!"

As he spoke, we walked rapidly toward our small house, and when we had it in sight, I was certain that I saw someone vanish around the corner of the building, but I gave it not much thought until afterward, when I found that we had had visitors during our absence. We foraged hastily in our scanty store of provisions and made a light meal.

"It would be well if we changed from these deerskins," I suggested hopefully. For many days I had had but small opportunity to wear my new scarlet clothes. Martin agreed, and after we had washed ourselves well, trimmed our hair, and put on the finer clothes, we made a very creditable appearance. It was while thus occupied that I became convinced — from the changed position of my possessions — that some person had been among them, — the unknown, of whom I had caught a glimpse as we came up. I began to guess at the identity of our caller, but with small success; I had a fleeting impression of a slender figure in black — that was all! Then I remembered that he wore a scabbard of green leather, bound with yellow metal that glinted in the sunshine. I should

know him by that! I kept my thoughts to myself, — I was sure that Martin had noticed nothing amiss, — for I had no desire that Martin should think me a silly boy, frightened at every shadow.

It was mid-afternoon when we arrived at the river's mouth and watched, with others, the slow approach of the strange craft. There was a light wind and they sailed well, but it seemed slow work to us, impatient as we were for a sight of new faces and news from France.

As time went on, we could make out the flag at the masthead of the leading vessel.

"English!" cried Martin disdainfully. I was silent with disappointment.

"A queer people!" he exclaimed, after a pause. "A great people, for that matter. I have been much among them. They are brave, but fight without interest, woo without grace, and die with indifference. But what could you expect?" He shrugged expressively. "They breathe fog night and day; and for a treat they drink ale."

"A cheerful race, truly," I said.

"An illustrious one, all the same," Martin added. "They cover the seas of the whole world with their ships, and harry without mercy the galleons of the King of Spain — which last is a creditable thing, beyond a doubt."

The sun was sinking low in the west when the first ship sailed into the harbor and cast her anchor, and a great number of small boats put out from the shore and surrounded her, ours among them. As we drew

close to her, a beardless, sunbrowned young man of great size appeared above and hailed us in very bad French, inviting us aboard. A ladder of rope was flung over the side and we ascended. We were conducted at once to a large cabin, comfortably furnished, where we were made known to the admiral of the fleet, Captain John Hawkins, a famous mariner among the English.

He was a short, broad man, dressed in a suit of plum-color, somewhat stained with sea water, burly and powerful, apparently of great strength. A curling brown beard, close-cropped head, and long straight nose gave his face an aspect of astuteness, while his fierce, staring blue eyes betokened an inflexible courage. A dealer in human flesh and hard blows, a slaver, and a gentleman-rover, he was a true man of the sea.

"Messieurs," he said, after a smiling greeting, "I have sailed these many leagues out of my proper course to bring you a warning. While trading with the Spaniards at Havana, I did hear of a large expedition under Pedro Menendez, an admiral of Spain, some fifteen sail, coming to stamp out the new religion here. And so, being of the reformed faith myself, I thought to come and make offers of service to your commander."

"Well, at least, we shall see some action," said Martin. He told Captain Hawkins how matters stood with us. He shook his head doubtfully, but promised to call on Monsieur de Laudonnière in the morning.

"Jean Ribault?" he said, in answer to my inquiry. "Nay, I heard nothing of him. But he may have sailed after I left England. I have been a year away. A long voyage, gentlemen, but a prosperous one, for I gained much money on the blackamoors I brought from Africa for the Spanish plantations around Havana. They are treacherous dogs, those Dons: they speak me well, but they would liefer cut my throat — if they dared." He laughed, and his brilliant blue eyes twinkled fiercely.

"But they have felt the weight of English swords ere now, — aye, and shall feel them again. Make no doubt of that; — so they go carefully with us, for the time. Still, I came near to death on this voyage, in a stinking hole of a port near Cape Blanco on the African coast. A fever, messieurs; and the ship's surgeon despaired of my life for some days. He bled me most furiously, until I could scarce stand on my two feet. But I had no fear, for I knew that God would not let one of His anointed die in such a place among the heathen, so I made shift, with His help, to get well again."

At this astounding statement, Martin's eyes showed a sudden spark of merriment, and he congratulated the Englishman on his good fortune and what Martin was pleased to call his "good standing with God." I took it that he had no great wit, for he beamed upon Martin after that remark, entirely blind to the ironical flavor of it. We took our leave shortly afterward. A few boats still lay about the ship, and her consorts were coming up the river. Dusk was falling

as the cables roared, and strange commands floated clearly to us across the water.

We hastened to report to René de Laudonnière the substance of our interview with the English admiral. Our news made him grave and thoughtful.

"We are in poor condition to fight the Spaniards, or anyone else, so far as that is concerned. We have many sick from fever and weak from lack of nourishment. Mayhap we can buy stores from this Englishman — even a ship — who knows? Then we can send home the ailing and discontented. 'Tis worth trying."

The next morning Captain Hawkins appeared at the fort, dressed handsomely in bright yellow satin, and made a call of courtesy on Laudonnière. He repeated to the commandant all he had said to us, and Laudonnière inquired anxiously as to the force of the Spaniards, but the Englishman knew very little in addition to what he had already told us. Then our captain broached to him the subject of selling us a ship, and Hawkins very graciously consented to part with one vessel.

"And of naval stores I can spare a great quantity, monsieur," he added, tugging the while at his beard, "for while I made a slow voyage, my crews are small — I have lost many by sickness — and my needs few." He named a low price.

Laudonnière accepted it at once. "It is a great service, monsieur le capitaine, for which I cannot thank you enough."

Hawkins bowed, remarking that one of his vessels

had been so battered by the storms some days before that she had been forced to put back to Havana for extensive refitting, and would follow him home at a later date. I thought little of this circumstance at the time; but afterward I had cause to be thankful for it.

Going the next day to pay my respects to Marie de la Costa, I found her surrounded by the younger officers of the English fleet, among them the tall man who had first hailed Martin and me the day before. He was the only one who had any French, — and that but slight, — so it was with difficulty that I restrained my laughter at their bungling attempts to flatter. The big sun-browned man was the leader in this, of course, because of his smattering of our language. Under ordinary circumstances I should have admired his well-formed body and handsome, laughing face, but his persistent attempts to gain the lady's favor pleased me but little, although I put a good face on the matter.

"Did you not think the large one a brave and handsome young man?" she asked of me when at last they had taken leave with many smiles and bows.

"Nay," I said shortly, "nothing so wonderful. Courage is in the heart, not in the arms. A little man may be as valiant as a big one, and more so, when it comes to that. As to his looks — well, he may look handsome to a young maiden's eyes — I saw nothing but a great lout!"

Why I made this ungracious remark I cannot say, unless, perhaps, because she had shown me such slight

attention. I did not look at her when I spoke, but kept my eyes steadfastly before me. She moved away.

"At least he acted as becomes a man, and not like a sulky boy," she said, and walked rapidly toward her father's house.

As I looked, my anger melted away and I was tempted to run after her, to crave pardon for my churlishness, but pride held me back. She should not have taken offense so quickly, I thought, forgetting, in my mulish proudness, that it was my fault. And that was the last time I looked on her charming face for days. The devilish, stiff-necked Breault temper forbade me to acknowledge my fault. I went home in anger, but as I crossed the narrow street in front of my quarters I saw young De Merrillac before me, at some distance. He wore a sword with a green leather scabbard, mounted in glittering yellow metal.

This set me to thinking.

The English vessels lay for some time in the harbor, refitting; when they sailed they left behind a small caravel and the supplies promised by their commander. Martin was cheerful now, happy in the prospect of action. We haunted the seaboard, at Monsieur de Laudonnière's suggestion, keeping a sharp lookout for hostile sails; but the days rolled through their cloudless lengths. August drew to a close, and the vast blue plain of the sea remained unbroken by any sail.

XV

THE RETURN OF JEAN RIBAULT

Those were dark days at Fort Carolin. The shadow of Spain's heavy hand lay black across it, and the faces of the colonists were gloomy with evil forebodings. Laudonnière worked night and day to strengthen our position, cajoling, threatening, commanding — all to little avail. Every evening there were services conducted by the more devout; sonorous hymns rolled out upon the warm breeze; silent red visitors listened with impassive pleasure; these were nightly occurrences. There was censure of René de Laudonnière for his indifference to the faith, — a matter some had harped on for months, — rebellion against his commands, a constant discontent at his conduct of affairs.

"There is no need for all this hurry," remarked one Belot to Martin. He was a rat-faced little man, pock-marked and dressed in rusty black, who preached at times, or led in the singing. " 'Twould take a large force to reduce this position, even as it is now."

Martin looked at him pityingly. "With two hundred seasoned men I would promise to capture it in two hours," he said. "You are not a soldier, monsieur, that is evident. You had best listen to those who are your betters in military matters," he added severely. "Leave the matter of defense to Monsieur de Laudonnière, as he leaves that of upholding the faith to you."

"As to that," Belot answered, "we shall make charges against him, at the proper time and to those of the proper authority, for his neglect of these matters. We shall see — "

Martin chuckled. "So that's the way the wind blows, eh?" Then his face grew stern. "Be careful, monsieur, that's a game two can play at!" Belot left us at once, a bit frightened at the wrath he saw in Belcastel's countenance.

As the days passed without the appearance of an enemy, the first fright faded from mind, and most of us settled back into the lazy, easy life we had always lived. Laudonnière busied himself with making seaworthy the two vessels in the river and preparing such defense as he could. And then one morning, as Martin and I patrolled the beaches, glaring white in the new morning sunshine, watching the flights of blue and rose-colored herons, with long beaks and reed-like legs, and the comic antics of snowy pelicans, we caught a gleam of something white upon the horizon. A sail, beyond all doubt! It was followed by another, and still another, and in the end we counted seven sail coming rapidly before the fresh wind. All morning they came on, while Martin speculated as to their identity, but it was not until well past noon that I seemed to see in the leading vessel something familiar. I felt for her a queer friendliness which I could not understand. We gazed anxiously at the tiny flag flying from her masthead, but could not make it out. Then she changed her course slightly and I saw her in a new aspect. I knew her — the Trinity!

"French ships, Martin!" I shouted. "The Trinity! The Trinity! I'd know her anywhere!"

"I verily believe you are right," Martin said, never taking his eyes off the ship. "I am no seaman, but I seem to recognize her. Aye, 'tis the Trinity, beyond doubt. That will be Jean Ribault at last. Now — "

"Now we shall see France once again," I broke in, happy at the prospect.

"I thought you had more pressing interests here," Martin said pointedly, a remark which caused to spring up in my mind the picture of a face I had not seen in days. In the drawing of a breath, the day lost its savor, as I reflected sadly that I could never leave this savage land alone. This was no place for women, I thought. Only a madman like the Sieur de la Costa would expose one to dangers so fearful as those which menaced us.

"At least this reënforcement will enable us to meet these Spanish gentry on more even terms," Martin said a little later. "Of course," he added regretfully, "it may lessen the hazard. And I tell you, Blaise, I am greedy for battle. Idling here like a cast-off sword, who wouldn't be?"

"Do not fret about the peril, Martin," I told him. "If these Spaniards come with fifteen ships, as the Englishman said, there will be honor to be gained — enough and to spare for all!"

"Yes, I am hopeful," he replied, his face brightening. "We may do a great deed, for these are excellent fighters, these Spaniards, good givers and takers of blows."

Boats began to appear on the river, and others of the colony joined us. In the late afternoon the Trinity dropped anchor in the river, amid loud shouts of welcome and much rejoicing. We boarded her. The first man we saw was Monsieur Ribault, whose honest face beamed a welcome as he crossed the deck.

"Mon Dieu! You gladden my eyes," he cried. "We thought you dead and mourned in good earnest for you. I'll warrant you have had a fine adventure, eh, Martin?"

"A fair one enough," answered Martin, smiling at his enthusiasm. "But our story can wait. I think you are about to have other callers."

A voice hailed from the river for permission to come aboard; and that being accorded, there came over the side that mean little Belot, with an ingratiating smile on his harsh features, one Lacherre, a tall man with furtive, downcast eyes and a melancholy manner, and — to my surprise — Roger de Merrillac. What he did with such men as these I could not imagine; and he gave no explanation to any, but greeted Jean Ribault as an old friend and then drew off to one side. We followed his example. Belot immediately began to recite to Monsieur Ribault a long petition demanding the removal of René de Laudonnière, charging him with many things of which you have already heard, and censuring him strongly for his neglect of the faith.

"I will think carefully over these matters you mention, monsieur," Jean Ribault said cautiously, after Belot had concluded his lengthy and rambling charge,

"but I find it very hard to believe that my old friend has knowingly neglected the interests of the colony. And in regard to your spiritual needs, messieurs, I have brought along Monsieur Robert, here, to administer to them." He indicated a white-haired, venerable-looking man of some fifty years who stood close by, clad in a decent black suit.

While this was going on, De Merrillac had cast at me many black looks, but I paid no attention to them, for I sincerely pitied him the suffering into which his jealousy had plunged him.

No sooner had Monsieur Ribault finished his remarks, than there came another loud hail from the water, and a moment later Laudonnière appeared on the deck; his face, once so ruddy and handsome, now pale and worried, his eyes without their usual lustre. But he advanced briskly enough to meet Jean Ribault, and in a moment they were clasped in each other's arms. By my faith — it pleasured my eyes to see this meeting between two old comrades! For some time they paced the deck side by side, conversing in low tones; Laudonnière, impatient and hurried; Ribault, tranquil and soothing. Soon the anxious expression on Laudonnière's features began to disappear, and he became, after a while, his usual smiling self.

Jean Ribault turned then to the company. "I find the charges against Monsieur de Laudonnière to be of little consequence, small matters for which I have brought the remedy in the person of Monsieur Robert, and I will advise with you about these things later,

messieurs. I have brought you new seeds for planting, more help, and soldiers for protection against the Spaniards. I am told that we may need them, and that right shortly. But, God willing, gentlemen, we will build here such a New France as will astonish our friends at home."

In further conversation he declared that he had heard nothing of any Spanish fleet. The Trinity and her consorts had met with no other vessels, but had, on the contrary, had a quiet and uneventful passage.

Belot and Lacherre were somewhat taken aback by the turn of events and took themselves off without further words.

De Merrillac accompanied them after some hesitation, favoring me with an insolent stare as he went over the side, a kindness which I repaid with a laugh as irritating as I could make it. On the whole, however, I was content to let matters stand as they were, for I had no reason to fear the outcome of a struggle with him.

"But if these caballeros of Spain do attempt anything against us," Admiral Ribault was saying when I again turned my attention to the conversation, "I shall not fear particularly for the outcome. With such a ship as the Trinity under our feet, mes amis, and such a goodly supply of arms and munitions as we have, we may do a deed that will bring us much fame."

"Mayhap it would be better to fight on land," Martin ventured to say. "We should be able to harass them in the swamps and morasses of this country to

good advantage, on ground we know well. The sea is any man's field."

"Nay, mon cher Martin, the sea has her advantages — for her sons," answered Ribault thoughtfully, "and I am a seaman. I should be lost on the land."

"And I on the water," said Martin smilingly. "However, we had best cross no bridges until we reach them."

"Conditions must govern us, without doubt," said Laudonnière, "but it seems to me that with our new forces the fort could easily be put in condition to stand a long siege, if necessary; and we could conduct our operations with greater certainty on land."

"Maybe you are right, but let us not discuss it further now, gentlemen," said Jean Ribault. "Let us rather give thanks to God for our safe passage, and pray to Him for victory over our enemies. Monsieur Robert will make such a prayer for us, eh, monsieur?"

The old man bowed in assent, and uncovered his white head to the soft wind humming musically through the rigging. When he knelt upon the deck the whole company followed his example: nobles and commoners, adventurers and sailors bowed their heads together. The last rays of a dying sun, striking down upon the deck, glorified alike the sharp-cut, high features of the leaders, the simple faces of tarry sailors, the stern, hard visages of soldiers; touched all these eager countenances with a shining light that softened their harshness and robbed them, for the moment, of all meanness. For a short space everything was forgotten except the simple, heartfelt words

of the man of God. For that little minute we were but a company of God's children, adventuring in a savage land, hard beset by new and unknown dangers, rendering to Him our thanks for His protection.

A few moments later we arose from our knees with a clatter of armor and weapons; faces resumed their usual aspect; we took up once again the tasks of life. The great moment was over.

XVI

SINISTER SAILS

The days that followed were busy ones, filled with the bustle of disembarking the large store of supplies Jean Ribault had brought. Boats plied constantly between ships and shore; sailors stretched their cramped bodies on land after the long voyage; the newcomers explored the country close around the fort, some boldly, some timidly, according to their temperaments.

It was about this time that I began to notice the mysterious actions and frequent journeys that Michel Barre made into the south. Day after day I met him going or coming. He seemed strangely interested in the country to the southward, for it was always in that direction I saw him going, and from that direction returning, each time. I was not greatly interested. Would that I had been!

He addressed me, when necessity arose, in his usual ingratiating way, although upon one such occasion I thought I perceived a heightened air of mockery upon his wily face, a sharper malice in his eye. It caused a momentary uneasiness in my mind, but that soon passed away. So many months had passed since I had fallen under the shadow of this man's enmity, and I had taken no hurt from it, that I began to feel for him the contempt of familiarity. I had rated him too high,

I was sure; I had paid him a compliment he did not deserve, in watching him. He must have read something of my thought in my face, and there flashed for an instant in his eye a look of ironic pity, as though he had seen a child playing witlessly with a sharp weapon, or sporting beneath the feet of a savage horse. I was startled, thoughtful for a time, but again I forgot it in the rush and hurry about me.

You may be sure we kept our eyes turned seaward during those days, searching the far horizon for the first signs of life; but it was not until the seventh day after Jean Ribault's arrival that our vigilance was rewarded. On the morning of the fourth of September we saw rising above the horizon the topsails of a large vessel. It was followed by others until we counted fifteen sail, a mighty fleet, sailing slowly toward us before a light breeze. We had no doubt but that they were Spanish, those fifteen craft, dark and sinister against the luminous eastern sky. Then the wind died and they lay becalmed for hours, so that, gaze as we would, we could not make them out.

Jean Ribault sent hastily for Laudonnière, Le Moyne and others, who with Martin and me, young Ribault, Monsieur Orthes, Ribault's first officer, and the captain himself, held a council. René de Laudonnière and Martin Belcastel held staunchly to their plan of fighting by land, while Jean Ribault was firm in his determination to make it a naval engagement.

"By so doing," he contended, "we should remove the battle from the fort, and at the same time leave a base to fall back on."

"We have the advantage of the ground if we defend the fort," Laudonnière replied.

"And we must remember they have two ships to our one," said Martin.

"Yes, and five men to our one, beyond any doubt," Ribault answered. "An advantage, you will admit, that requires much overcoming, eh?"

The argument raged, each holding stubbornly to his idea. I kept a discreet silence, such as was proper in one of my small years. At last, Monsieur Ribault silenced all opposition by an unanswerable argument.

"Much as I regret to do so," he said, with a ring of finality in his tone, "I must insist upon my plan being followed. I command here. I believe there is no question of that?" He looked about the circle.

Laudonnière's bearded face flushed and he moistened his lips, but he said nothing. Martin looked at Ribault in silence for a moment. Then he smiled.

"At least, your position has one virtue, mon cher ami," he remarked, "we have arrived at a definite plan."

"I shall leave here a small force under Monsieur de Laudonnière, taking as many men with me as we can spare."

He assigned each of us a task: Laudonnière to get as many men as he could spare aboard the vessels; Martin to assist him; myself to keep watch on the progress of the strange ships. Laudonnière insisted that Martin and I be left with him to help with the defense of Fort Carolin, if it should happen that the engagement at sea went against us, as seemed most

likely, considering the superior forces of the enemy. This disappointed me, and Belcastel too, for I desired to see a naval battle; and Martin wished to lose no opportunity to fight the Spaniards, for whom he entertained a long and enduring hatred, as did many of the veterans of the Italian wars.

They set me ashore and I paced the glaring white beach all the afternoon, gazing at those ships lying motionless on the smooth water, unruffled by any wind. Except for a slight drift to the north, they lay still, like beasts of prey waiting for nightfall to creep upon their victims. At sunset a light breeze sprang up, and to my astonishment they made sail and bore away to the southward. I lost no time in reporting this to our commander, who decided at once to make a more complete preparation for his foray upon the enemy.

Two days later he sailed away to the south, and for some days we saw nothing of our own vessels or those of the enemy. The few of us left at the fort were in a constant state of excitement, each day filled with alarms; and it fell to the cooler heads to soothe the sick and old. Our little company consisted, in all, of some eight-score souls, chiefly the sick and ailing, or women and children. Only about twenty of us had borne arms. A flimsy garrison, messieurs, to oppose the might of Spain! Martin shook his head sadly when he spoke of it.

"Should the day go against Jean Ribault," he said, "which God forbid! those bigoted devils will fall upon us like a wolf pack on a sheepfold!"

" 'Twould be a great fight," I said hopefully.

Martin looked at me scornfully. "No fight at all," he said, in the patient tone of one who speaks to a child. "They would smother us in mere numbers. Swordplay would avail us nothing. No, we should have to run again, Blaise! In that way we might save our lives: live in order to take vengeance."

I was much cast down by Martin's view of the situation, and my spirits did not revive until the day our vessels returned to the harbor. No sooner had the Trinity cast her anchor than a boat, bearing Jean Ribault, shot toward the shore. Monsieur Ribault hastened away toward the fort when he landed, without a word to anyone. There was an anxious light in his eyes, which usually sparkled so merrily in his brown, bearded face, an unseemly haste in his rolling gait, commonly so deliberate. I wondered at this, you may be sure.

It was Mathias Mallon who satisfied my curiosity. He came ashore some time later and I engaged him at once in conversation.

"We stood straight out to sea," he said, in answer to my question, pulling earnestly at his moustaches. His thin, bony face was thoughtful. "For two days we swept the face of the waters and saw no sign of these strangers. Then we laid a course for the coast and came upon it after many hours of sailing before a light breeze."

"And what luck there?" I asked eagerly.

"Not much, at first," he admitted, "but we cruised along the shore, and on the second day saw the masts

of seven vessels in a small harbor sixteen or seventeen leagues south of where we stand, I should judge."

"Spanish?"

He nodded soberly.

"Only seven though, while we had first sighted fifteen sail, you remember. Here was a thing! Our officers hesitated to attack for fear of being caught in the harbor by the return of the other eight craft."

"They feared to be taken in the rear by a superior force, no doubt," I remarked, in order to show him that I had some smattering of military matters. He smiled at my remark.

"That of a certainty," he replied. "There were but seven ships, it is true, the same number as ours but much larger galleons, there was the danger of a crossfire from the shore, where a large number of soldiers were at work upon a fortification. Oh, they are well-armed, these Spaniards!"

"Still," I said, "had you cut off those ships, you might have dealt with the others at your leisure and — "

"So said I — aye, and many others. It was as though it had been arranged for us. We urged Monsieur Ribault to attack; but he thought otherwise. He was of the opinion that the rest of the Spanish fleet had sailed to beleaguer Fort Carolin, so we returned here at speed — and lost our great chance," he ended on a bitter note.

"Still, it was no certainty," I said, to soothe him.

"Mordieu, no! There are no certainties in war," he cried, "but it was a chance — a chance to win all

in one cast. But battles are not won by the timid; you can't haggle and — "

"Nor by the rash and reckless," I interrupted him sharply, nettled by his contempt for Monsieur Ribault, a feeling he did not try to conceal.

Mallon smiled sardonically and walked away without making any answer, wearing the disdainful air of a man who wastes his speech upon a dullard.

Some days later I forgave him gladly that air of superiority. He died as a brave man.

XVII

MICHEL BARRE DISAPPEARS

SEVEN galleons, seven great ships of Spain, with gilded and carven bows, sailed majestically over the blue sea toward the coast. I watched them for hours, while I paced the warm sands at the mouth of the Rivière de Mai. As they drew nearer, I could make out the pennons flying at their mastheads above their lofty sails, see the slap of waves against their stout sides, the flash of weapons on their crowded decks. In the middle of the afternoon Martin Belcastel joined me; but he had little to say for a long time, gazing thoughtfully at the vessels and rubbing the palm of his right hand absently on the rough cloth of his sleeve. I observed this for some time, until at last he noticed my interest.

"There will be fighting soon," he said, with a sober smile. "My sword-hand itches abominably, and to-day my old blade leaped halfway from its scabbard as I crossed that small stream near the north gate of the fort. You may laugh at an old soldier's superstitions, you young sprig, but you shall see. And soon!"

"Let it come!" I cried, my eyes on the Spanish ships, "aye, let it come! I've rusted long enough. Better to die in the heat of a great fight than to waste one's life away here."

"Well, I for one have no intention of dying, if I can help it," Martin answered, in his cool way. "I have a longing for France. And I shall win to it, — I have a feeling, — but there will be fighting beforehand. After all, the sword is the only trade for a man of spirit. You are right, Blaise, in a way; to die gloriously is better than to rust away. But we shall not die. Let us hope, then, for a great feat of arms — and be not too much disappointed if we fail."

"We may not come through alive, Martin. I had not given it much thought, but — well — at any rate I give you my little estate of Breault if I should be slain."

"Who talks of being slain?" said Martin in a rough tone. "Are we men, or old women gossiping by the fire? But if it should fall out that I don't win through, mon cher ami, you will find among my papers in Paris something of interest to you. I have loved you at first for the sake of your father, my old comrade; but now for your own. 'Twould only be fair if I were to die by the sword of one of these Spaniards — Mordieu! I have lived all my life with a sword in my hand, and the Scriptures say that 'all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.' Well, I've lived by it, and ask no better than to die by it. Many a good man have I sent to Heaven, but never a one but had weapon in his hands, in fair fight."

"My mind is all befogged with 'ifs,' " I said, to conceal my emotion. "Let us talk of something else."

"That's an idea!" said Martin, with one of his dry chuckles. "I saw your fat friend, the mysterious

dealer in secrets, just before I joined you. He seemed in haste, and his shoes and hose were besmeared with mud. He slowed his pace when he saw me, greeted me most courteously, but said nothing of any importance — truly a strange man! And not one to be trifled with, eh?"

"I know not, Martin. At times I am sure that he is a man to be feared; but when I remember that I have lived for three years under his anger and taken no hurt of him, I am not so sure. After all, he has never done us injury. It may be that this coil of guesses and hazards is fashioned only in our minds."

"Trouble comes upon us when we least expect it," Martin observed, rubbing his hand once again upon his sleeve. "At any rate it costs nothing to keep our eyes open."

While we talked the strangers came on steadily, making straight for the harbor. Behind us, in the river, the Trinity and her sisters tugged at their cables in the swift flow of the tide. Their decks were alive with men, and sailors clung everywhere in the rigging watching the oncoming ships. We saw nothing of Monsieur Ribault. A brooding quiet hung over the stream, the men, and the forest.

"Let us be out of this before the Spaniards see us," Martin said suddenly. "To pick us off with these new-fashioned muskets would be such sport as those gentry love."

We turned our steps to our caneu, which was pulled up on the sands, and were soon on our way up the river. As we moved slowly against the sluggish

current, past the anchored ships and the men gazing intently out to sea, we said no word. My thoughts were busy wondering what would be the outcome of the impending fight, until the sight of a woman on the path from the fort brought home to me the horrors that might be visited upon our people, if the day went against us. I turned in terror from the thought of my beloved lady in the hands of the invaders and swore a great oath that it should never be while I lived.

As we followed the path up the low hill, Martin suggested that we had best take up our station at some vantage-point on the shore, where we could see well all that occurred; and it was with this idea in mind that we made our way across the square in such a direction as would enable us to strike a little-used path through the woods, which would bring us out at a point on the river opposite to the moorings of the Trinity. Here we would find good cover, I knew, for I had once slain a deer from that very covert. When we had covered half the distance across the parade ground, we came face to face with Michel Barre. His shoes were covered with dried mud, his round face reddened by wind and sun, his faded clothes torn by briers and branches, but he moved with his ordinary quickness in spite of these signs of hard travel, and saluted us with his usual mocking courtesy.

"It seems we are to have visitors, messieurs," he ventured, flashing us a strange, questioning glance from his single eye.

"Within the hour," answered Martin, "and of quite

a different disposition from the last, if I am a judge."

"Aye, these Spaniards have little love for the new faith," fat Michel returned. "Besides, I have heard it said that the King of Spain does claim this land for his own, and will brook no trespass upon it."

"You appear to have been a long journey, monsieur," I said, staring pointedly at his bespattered feet. There came a sudden gleam of exultation in his eye, gone as quickly as it came.

"Not too long, Monsieur de Breault, not too long," he answered, as he left us.

After we had traversed most of the distance to the river, Martin broke into one of his chuckles. I looked at him inquiringly.

"Mordieu! Did you see the look upon his face, Blaise? Like a cat at a dish of cream. The crafty knave! I wonder what new deviltry he is hatching now."

"Well, if it is as harmless as the rest, 'tis no great matter," I said.

"A new secret, doubtless," Martin remarked, dismissing it with a shrug of his broad shoulders.

Had we but known how terrible a secret lay locked in that cunning brain, we had not passed it over so carelessly, but had hunted him down for the mad dog he was.

On the river shore we found a place where we had an unobstructed view of the stream and the broad salt-marsh beyond. To our right rolled the vast blue plain of the sea; to the left stretched the limitless green of the swamp with its waving grasses and scattered

hillocks, where many rose-colored and blue herons fed industriously among the pools. In the drowsy hush of the afternoon the slightest sounds came clearly to us across the placid water: the rattle of arms on the vessels in the stream, occasional low-voiced comments from men in the rigging or on decks, cleared for action. Looking out from our leafy covert, I saw an ugly mass of clouds thrust itself, wedge-like, into the bright sky far to the northeast; the breeze freshened as the storm drew nearer, and lightning gleamed fitfully from its sombre depths. Martin cast an appraising eye at the heavens.

"Mayhap there will be no battle after all, to-day," he said. "These men of the sea may be hard put to it to save their ships. This looks like a mighty storm."

I nodded.

As I did so, the first of the strange vessels appeared within the range of my vision and sailed majestically up the stream, followed at intervals by her consorts. Seven galleons of large size with the carven likenesses of saints for figureheads — my heart sank as I saw how they dwarfed the gallant little Trinity and the others of the French fleet. Aboard our ships there was a momentary stir of activity, as the sailors slid from their high places to the deck, but there was no voice raised as the galleons took their slow way to an anchorage up the stream. The Spaniards' decks were crowded with soldiers, black-bearded, swarthy men for the most part, whose armor shone like gold in the yellow rays of the sinking sun; and the forecastles, perched high above the water, were filled with fighting-

men. On the foredeck of the leading vessel stood a medium-tall man, clad in rich armor. His head was bare and his pale skin made a startling contrast with his black hair and square-cut beard. His eyes were cold and hard, his lips thin and cruel, his whole countenance impassive and icy.

One by one we heard the loud splash of the ships' anchors and the rumble of their cables. Then silence fell again.

From the direction of the fort a boat appeared upon the river. With the gleam of the sun on the water, I could scarce make it out, but I got a glimpse of its single occupant, just as it disappeared beyond the farther of the Spanish ships. Beyond a doubt, that huge body could belong to no one but Michel Barre. What new scheme had he hatched now in his busy brain, I wondered.

"The mysterious fat man again," Martin's dry voice broke in upon my thoughts. "Ma foi! 'Twould make a play for the Queen Mother's Italian mummers!"

"What is he going to do, think you?" I inquired.

Martin shrugged indifferently. "Who knows? Join Monsieur Ribault, or surrender to the Spaniards to save his fat skin."

"Nay," I said doubtfully. "I believe him to be no coward —"

I broke off, for there was a movement aboard the Trinity. I could see Jean Ribault's familiar figure mount from the waist to the foredeck. In his hand he bore a short, heavy axe.

"What ships are these?" he hailed in a loud voice.

"Ships of His Majesty the King of Spain," came the answer. There was a momentary silence.

"Who commands and what want ye here?" asked Ribault.

"I am Pedro Menendez, High Admiral of Spain, and I am come by command of my master to kill trespassers upon his dominion of Florida."

At that Jean Ribault raised his arm and struck twice with the axe. There was a sharp crack as the cable parted, and the Trinity, released from her anchor, began to swing with the current toward the sea. Instantly there was great activity aboard the other vessels of our fleet, as they followed the Trinity's example. Sailors swarmed among the sails, which were shaken out and filled in a second with the strong wind. In a short time they were all in full flight toward the sea.

Although the Spaniards were surprised, they were not far behind them. At once the air was filled with sharp cries as they raised their anchors and prepared for pursuit. In half an hour the harbor was empty.

I looked at the sky. The eastern heavens were obscured by heavy masses of storm clouds; the wind was increasing in strength each moment; the surf boomed thunderously on the beaches. Martin shook his head sorrowfully, and in gloomy silence we pursued our way through the falling dusk to Fort Carolin.

XVIII

A CRIMSON DAWN

Before we had reached the fort the sky was heavily overcast; the tall trees about us swayed in a wind that increased in strength each minute, and within the hour rain began to fall in torrents. Darkness dropped upon us quickly, and we made poor going of it in the mud of the path to Monsieur de Laudonnière's house, where we arrived wet and breathless, to find our commander pacing the floor, buried in moody thought.

"Ah, mes amis," he cried, without pausing for a moment in his energetic stride, "we are in perilous case. Jean Ribault has treated us a little badly, for we are in no condition to defend this place, should he lose the day at sea. Seventeen soldiers! That is our garrison, besides our three selves and ten old men who have borne arms in their youth. I have just counted noses — almost sevenscore women, and sick or ailing men. Nom d'un nom!"

"We can but do the best we can and trust in God," Martin said philosophically. "We must keep a sharp lookout; post such sentries as we can, and hope for the best."

He listened for a moment to the roar of the wind outside and the beat of the rain on the roof over our heads.

"There can be no battle in such a storm," he added.

"Our enemy must come from the river," remarked Laudonnière. "That is a satisfaction. We are protected on all other sides by impassable marshes."

"I am not so sure of that," Martin spoke up. "Determined men might come at us from the south."

But Laudonnière would have none of this: dismissed it as an impossibility.

For four days and nights it rained continually. Streams swelled and broke over their low banks, flooding the swamps on all sides of Fort Carolin. We heard nothing of Jean Ribault and the Spaniards, but lived in a state of constant anxiety, hoping for the safe return of the French vessels, fearing that each day would bring down upon us the terrible and implacable soldiers of Spain. A veil of horror settled over the colony. One old man went about forever crying to God to save him from the bloody butchers of Spain, showing his crippled limbs and crushed fingers, half witless with terror. Others waited in stolid resignation for whatever might come; still others prophesied defeat, slavery, death for all of us. Laudonnière was hard put to it to keep them from rushing away into the misty, dank depths of the forest to perish miserably. Two small caravels, deemed by Jean Ribault unfit for sea, still lay in the river, and upon these, in case of need, Laudonnière proposed to escape.

Martin alone, of the whole company, went about the duties assigned him, unmoved, and I — Mordieu! I could do no less than follow his example, for very pride. It fell to our lot to do a turn of sentry duty during the first watch of the night, from sunset until

midnight. The never-ending rain obscured the sight; the ceaseless moan of the wind through the drenched forest deadened all sound. I peopled the dark gloomy night with a thousand enemies, a thousand terrors, jumped at every sound; one night I almost had my sword through Laudonnière's body, when he came too suddenly upon me as he made his rounds. Secretly, I was relieved in mind each time that midnight came and brought a man to take my place.

By the fourth day there was a feeling among many of the colonists that their fears had been foolish, and that we might perhaps escape the Spanish, after all. Michel Barre had disappeared, beyond all doubt. It was my opinion, which I confided to Martin, that he had joined one of the French vessels during the confusion of their departure; but Martin had nothing to say.

That night the rain settled down to a steady drizzle; the wind died; the soft blackness seemed filled with a still menace, nameless dangers, death; yet nothing untoward occurred. But I was cheered when my turn was over at midnight. I joined Martin and without speech we plodded to our quarters through the softly falling rain. Arrived there, Martin threw off his sodden, heavy deerskins, to exchange them for dry ones.

"We had best sleep with one eye open to-night, mon ami," he said briefly, in answer to my inquiry, at the same time rubbing his sword hand on his sleeve in that way which had become a habit. I had learned to respect Martin's advice, so I changed my clothes

accordingly. I fell asleep thinking, not of Spaniards or battle, but of Marie de la Costa, regretting that the Breaults were cursed with such hot heads, which had caused me to quarrel with her.

I awoke just as the first faint gleams of a gray dawn came in at the windows. I wondered what had awakened me. The world outside was hushed to silence, a deep, uncanny stillness that seemed to my overwrought nerves to hide a thousand nameless terrors. I felt my hair prickle and a chill run through my body. The rain had ceased and the wind no longer sighed about our little house; across the room Martin lay, a shapeless figure in the half-light, breathing calmly. I was minded to waken him, for I was sure that we were menaced by some unseen danger; but I cursed myself for an old woman fearful of every shadow, and refrained. I lay there, uneasy and alert, waiting — waiting — for I knew not what!

The dull light of the dawn brightened slowly into day. I reflected with some pleasure that, if anything should happen, I was — for the first time since I had known him — awake before Martin Belcastel, and might perhaps repay him in part for his watchful care of me. And even as I thought this there came from the southward a long, tremulous cry that chilled the blood in my veins. It was cut off short, as though its author had been struck down by a ruthless hand.

Before it had ended I was on my feet, sword in hand, and across the floor to Martin's side.

"Martin! Martin!" I cried; but the words were drowned in the tremendous roar of an explosion that

shook the house. Martin rose in a single bound, snatched up his weapons, and ran to the door. He looked out.

"No time to lose," he said, in his cool way. "They're through the south gate. Let's be gone. I've no mind to die here like a rat in a trap."

"But Marie! My lady! I must save her," I cried, "else life would mean nothing to me."

" 'Tis well said, son," Martin replied. "Lead! I will follow."

As I sprang from the door I saw that the south gate of the fort had been blown in; the portal was choked with a great crowd of men surging through. The feeble light of the new day gleamed dimly on their brandished weapons and steel caps. There was a loud clamor of shouting. Already the first comers had scattered around the fort among the buildings, and the shouts of men and screams of women filled the air. One old man, clad only in his shirt, a nightcap awry upon his gray head, ran out of a house near the gate and made play with his sword, but he was struck down in a twinkling; and a woman who followed him — in a nightshirt, ghostly in the silvery morning light — was knocked on the head with a musket-butt. That much I saw as I ran at my best speed across the parade ground. Behind I could hear the light sound of Martin's feet as he followed me.

When we approached the Sieur de la Costa's house, I saw its master, in shirt and hose as he had got from his bed, beset by three of the enemy, while a fourth man was just disappearing within the house. A broad

red stain was spreading slowly over the Sieur de la Costa's shirt; but his eyes were blazing, his white hair bristling, as he played his sword with a skill and activity that many a younger man might have envied. He seemed then another man than the one we had known, with windy talk and soaring plans. I feared that we should never reach him in time to save him, for he was weakening fast. We were still a good many paces away when a huge Spaniard beat down his blade and cut him savagely over the head. The old man slipped to his knees and the light went out of his brave eyes. When the Spaniard cut again he fell forward, a bloody and pitiful figure with his face in the mud, all his ambitious schemes drowned forever in a sea of blood.

"Get the girl, Blaise," panted Martin. "I will take care of these gentry."

As he spoke, there came a shriek of fear from within the house. Ere I had reached the door, I heard once more behind me the clash of steel, and Martin's bitter voice taunting our foes in a strange tongue. Within the room I found Marie struggling with the fourth Spanish soldier. Her tender body was crushed against his steel-clad breast and he was laughing uproariously at her efforts to escape him. She was partly dressed, but her little white feet were bare and drumming madly against his sturdy legs; her face was distorted, her eyes, wide with fear, staring wildly at the bearded countenance so close to hers. The sight of her, whom in my heart I had come to look upon as mine, in the arms of that black butcher drove me mad.

The hot lust to kill ran through me like a flame; the blood rushed to my head. At that moment I feared not all the Spaniards in the world.

He must have read his doom in my eyes when he saw me in the doorway, for he dropped my mistress and took to his sword. But I gave him no chance — Mordieu! The dog deserved none! In three passes I had driven him the length of the room and had him foining and parrying for his life amid a confusion of chairs and gear of all kinds. The ruddy color ebbed from his face and the fear of death stared out of his black glittering eyes. At the seventh pass I laid him stark dead upon the floor, with his throat ripped out.

Marie lay upon the floor where she had fallen; and gazed with fixed, frightened eyes at the man whose life was ebbing away from him with so many horrible twitchings and jerkings. I lifted her gently to her feet; but her eyes remained on the dying man before her; and she tore her gaze from him only with an effort.

"Blaise! Blaise!" she sobbed pitifully. "I thought you had forsaken me!"

"Ah, sweetheart, never think it!" I cried. "I'll never desert you. We'll live and die together — my own! Clothe yourself for a journey, Marie — we must fly for our lives."

Outside I could hear the sounds of struggle, and the shouts of the victorious Spaniards filled the air. I ran to the door. Martin's opponents had been increased by two. He was fighting with a coolness and craft good to look upon. His eyes were narrowed;

and although his face was cold and passionless he fought with gusto, the almost imperceptible glimmer of a smile around his firm lips. Twice they forced him back, and twice he advanced by the sheer cunning of his swordplay. Never had I seen such a fight! A great elation took possession of me as I ran to take my place at his side. Martin's easy, effortless play, apparently without method, leaving a hundred openings, puzzled these Spaniards, who fought by rote, by mechanical methods, along hard and fast lines. They had not touched him yet; while three of their number had been wounded.

When I entered the struggle, there fell to my lot the big man who had slain the Sieur de la Costa, and another slighter fellow. At the first engagement the smaller one forced me to so fine a parry that our hilts clashed; and before I could recover, the larger man had touched me in the shoulder — a mere pin-prick! It steadied me. I rallied and drove them back, thinking that I must eliminate one or the other of them, and that right shortly. I began to advance, and at the same time Martin ran so furiously upon his foes, behind his flashing steel, that they fell back before him in a panic. During the swift exchange of thrusts and cuts, the taller Spaniard lunged at my face, overreached himself, and before he could recover I whipped my blade, backhand, across his eyes.

"Madre di Dios!" he cried in his agony, dropped his sword, clapped both hands over his eyes and staggered away out of my sight.

"You devil! You'll murder no more!" I cried

grimly. For this was a punishment worse than death I had inflicted on him. He had paid dearly for his part in the murder of the women and children of Fort Carolin.

At this moment a new figure appeared and took his place upon my right. I saw, to my surprise, that it was Roger de Merrillac.

"Get Marie away!" I cried at him, ere he could engage. "To the river, and wait for us! We'll hold them — " He was gone before I could finish. Martin nodded, but said nothing, saving his breath for the work in hand. When I looked again, De Merrillac was gone.

XIX

THE FLIGHT IN THE FOREST

We had been fortunate thus far, for these Spaniards were armed only with sword and dagger; but I now saw coming in our direction, still some distance away, a soldier with a musket and two others with crossbows. The finest swordplay in the world would never save us now.

"Muskets and bows, Martin!" I panted. "Our swords will be useless against them."

"But we have legs also," said Martin, never turning his face from the enemy. "Fall back as I do."

We began at once to give ground slowly before the attack of our four enemies. It was hot work. Sweat ran into my eyes and blurred my sight, so that twice I escaped death only by good fortune. Our opponents were tiring fast, but we gained no advantage, because of their superior numbers. Martin, as usual, seemed made of iron, showing no lessening in the fury of his attack, pressing his foes with that fiery ardor which I admired so much; he gave them no respite, but kept them constantly put to it to save their lives. Thrice they beat down his blade by the sheer weight of their steel; but ere they could follow up their advantage, that deadly point glittered once more before their astonished eyes, like a warrant of certain death.

Then he thrust three times with lightning-like rapidity — three superb passes; and at the third attempt his blade glided like a serpent through that bristling hedge of weapons and fleshed itself. There was a loud cry, a glimpse of a falling body. We had one enemy the less. But the musketeer had by this time taken up a position favorable to him, while the bowmen were racing swiftly to take us in the flank. We had now fallen back as far as the Sieur de la Costa's house, and could see between it and the next building a clear path to safety.

"A sortie!" cried Martin.

We began once more to advance, and made such furious play with our swords that our foes were forced to fall back. In so doing they formed a shield for us from the fire of their allies, by spreading out, fanwise, before us. When we had pushed them back a dozen paces, Martin gave the word. In three bounds we were around the corner of the house, safe for a time from the fire of the musket and bows, racing at top speed straight for the low wall and the safety of the forest that lay beyond. As we climbed the half-finished barrier, I heard the loud report of a musket and a ball buried itself in the wall beside me. At the same instant, the heavy bolt from a crossbow passed with a hiss under Martin's outflung arm, while another, wide of its mark, passed harmlessly over our heads. A moment later we were safe in the familiar gloom of the woods, unhurt, save for a few scratches of little consequence, making our way as fast as we could toward the river. Behind us we could hear our

pursuers' yells of rage and disappointment as they followed. A grimly contemptuous smile illumined Martin's face as he heard them calling one to another, beating about through the underbrush between the fort and the river.

While they were so engaged, we lost no time in going directly to the river's shore and proceeding cautiously upstream, taking our way silently through the tangle of undergrowth, among the stiltlike roots of the trees; slipping like hurried wraiths across the open glades. The woodcraft we had learned from our savage friends stood us in good stead. So we went on for some time, unmolested, until from the shelter of a thicket I saw Marie and De Merrillac crossing a little opening among the trees just ahead. Martin smiled when he saw them. Marie was sobbing softly, while De Merrillac divided his time between efforts to comfort her and casting fearful looks about him. They looked as forlorn as the two lost children in the woods. In our rear I could hear the cries of our baffled pursuers, whom I had almost forgotten in the joy of seeing my lady again.

" 'Tis well we came upon them," Martin whispered. "Any chance passer might see them in this clearing, and these Spaniards are like hounds upon a blood-scent. Short work these murderous dogs would make of them."

I shuddered at the thought. A moment later we overtook them. Marie ceased to weep and ran to me with a glad cry, and such a radiant smile of welcome as was like the sun breaking through the clouds. A

spasm of pain crossed De Merrillac's face at the sight.

"Blaise! Blaise! I thought they had slain you!" she exclaimed. And fell promptly to crying again.

I soothed her as best I could, awkwardly enough, I fear, and after a time her sobs ceased and she asked in a fearful voice for her father. I made no answer for a moment, and she read the truth in my silence. She sobbed afresh when I told her — as gently as I could, for it irked me sore to hurt again her torn heart — that her sire was dead — valiantly dead. I said nothing as to the manner of his death, deeming it best to wait until she was in better case.

"You are wounded, Blaise!" she cried suddenly, pointing to the bloodstain upon my shoulder.

"Nay, 'tis hardly a scratch," I said, making nothing of the touch I had received in the shoulder, for it gave me no discomfort. "We must make our best speed away from here, ere these Spaniards come upon us again. Had we but a boat — "

"I will look for one," said Martin, resolutely turning to retrace his steps.

"That way lies certain death," said De Merrillac, "besides, there are no boats to be had, for we searched as we came along, and Spaniards swarm along the river like bees at a honeypot. No doubt they have taken the boats to look for stragglers."

"Then we must make the best of it afoot," Martin said at once. "There is no time to be lost. Do you lead, Blaise, and I will bring up the rear."

In this order we faced the terrors of the wilderness

— one woman and three men, without food, our only resources our wits and our swords, upheld only by the hope of winning clear: a forlorn hope indeed it appeared at that moment.

All day we plodded through the jungle, forcing our way through the matted growths of clinging vines, underbrush, and briars, turned back, time after time, by the flooded lowlands, seeking new paths when the old ones failed us. The moist earth steamed under the fierce heat of an ardent sun; we were wet with sweat, exhausted by the exertion of travel, filthy with mud, and half-eaten by swarming clouds of insects. But through the whole day we heard no complaint from Marie, who followed most bravely in my footprints; and Martin was moved to compliment her upon her fortitude. I made the way as easy as I could, but the day told terribly upon her tender body. Twice we heard searching parties of the enemy upon the river, but we eluded them without difficulty. At sunset Martin called a halt. We had put some four or five leagues between ourselves and the fort, and judged that we were safe from any Spaniards who might be searching the forest for those who had escaped.

We went to bed supperless, of necessity; and we lay without fire, thinking it dangerous to light one for fear of the glow betraying our whereabouts to the enemy. We wrapped Marie in her cloak, which I had carried most of the day, made her as comfortable as might be against the dew and the chill of the night, and each took our turns at standing guard, while the other two lay down upon the rain-soaked ground,

miserable and comfortless as homeless dogs, dozing off at times into an uneasy slumber from which we awoke with a start, fearful that the enemy was again upon us. It was an interminable night, alarming with the queer noises in the jungle which surrounded us: crackling of brushwood, stealthy movements, once a sight of the brilliant golden eyes of some animal. We arose with relief from our hard beds with the first light of the new day. Marie had slept but little; was lame in every muscle from the hard journey of the day before and the uneasy night. De Merrillac was in hardly better case. I had taken no ill effect from our adventure, being used to such travel, nor had Martin; but nowhere in the whole world, I venture to say, were four people in a more desperate and forlorn plight — and one of them a delicate and gently nurtured woman.

Our breakfast consisted of a few berries which we managed to find in the neighborhood — poor fare for such as we, with a hard day's march before us. I was certain that Marie could not go on, and said as much; but she protested her willingness to try.

"Let you and me, Blaise, make a search for a boat," Martin suggested. "We may find a Crique caneu hidden hereabout. Monsieur de Merrillac shall stay to look after Mademoiselle. You can hunt along the smaller streams, where these savages have a custom of hiding their craft; I will hold to the river. Do you stay in this spot, monsieur. It is safe as any and well hidden from the stream. Here we will look for you upon our return."

De Merrillac professed his desire to do all he could

for the common welfare, but Martin made no change in his arrangements. When all was settled, we set off together, but soon parted. For some little time I followed the turns and twistings of numerous small creeks, without success; and worked my way in a wide loop back to the place where we had left Marie and De Merrillac. I had seen nothing of Martin and hoped to find him returned before me with good news. More from habit than by intention, I approached the glade with that caution which had become a part of me during my years in the wilderness, where peril lurked in every bush and behind every tree. When I glanced into the clearing, my heart almost failed me.

It was empty!

For a moment my breath came hard to me; then I noticed that the ground was torn and trampled as though a sharp struggle had taken place. I began to look even more carefully for signs that would explain the absence of my fellow fugitives, but I had no need to look long. As my eyes followed the ragged edge of the tangled brushwood that surrounded the glade, they fell upon the dull gleam of metal in a clump of bushes some distance away, and I made out a dark, huddled form, indistinct, moveless, almost hidden in the thick shrubbery. I forgot prudence, sped across the open without thought of spying eyes, and a second later stood looking down upon the still form of Roger de Merrillac. I knelt beside him and shook him fiercely, as if to rattle from his still lips news of Marie. He gave no sign of life. I saw that he was riddled with wounds — a fair sieve of a man, almost cut to pieces.

He was blood from head to foot. Even before I heard the tale I knew he had died gallantly, against long odds. A new respect for him was born in my heart as I looked, for his wounds were all in front.

I ran to a pool, which I remembered to have seen near by among the trees, and brought water as best I could in my cupped hands. At the second attempt, when I dashed it in his pale face, he opened his eyes and looked at me blankly. He raised himself painfully on a shaky elbow.

"'Twas Michel Barre, fat Michel — and his Spaniards," he whispered in a faltering voice, which I could scarce hear at first, "who served me thus. They've taken Marie — she ran — like a poor fluttering bird — but they pulled her down — " His voice gathered strength. "The dogs!"

"Where have they gone?" I asked sharply.

He shook his head weakly. "Michel Barre — the traitorous villain — he promised Marie to me — for my help against you — I don't think I am telling you anything new. I meant her no harm, De Breault — 'twas he, fat Michel, who led the Spaniards into Fort Carolin." He drew his breath with a great effort and was forced to pause for rest. "Ah, forgive me, De Breault — I am dying, and wish no man's hatred. I was mad with love — jealous of her love for you — Oh, aye, she loves you — told me to-day that it was so." He stopped, and sank down again upon the ground; but I raised him and supported him against my knee.

"I regret that I did take part against you with

such — such scum as Michel Barre," he went on hesitatingly, "but I loved her — even as you do. They fell on me ere I was aware of them — before I could draw I was pierced twice through the vitals. I cried to Marie to run for her life — but a great black Spaniard seized her ere she had gone a dozen paces. I fought my best — eight of them — and fat Michel standing behind them, laughing — the devilish traitor! I have sullied the honor of my house — a good house — " there was a note of wistful sadness in his faint voice. "I fain would have your forgiveness, Blaise de Breault — for the injury I have — "

Hot tears scalded my eyes, until I could hardly see the beseeching face in front of me. All dislike of him faded in that instant from my mind, from my memory — this fair lad, dying in a strange land so far from the bright kingdom of his birth. I took his poor bloody hand in mine and pressed it; nodded, for I could not speak because of the lump that swelled in my throat and was near to choking me. He smiled at my nod, as though he understood, and returned the pressure of my hand.

"Tell Marie — that I died well! May God have mercy on me." He closed his eyes, and I thought he was gone, when suddenly he opened them.

"Behind you, De Breault! Defend yourself!" he cried, with a great effort. A stream of crimson burst from his lips. He fell back dead.

As I turned, I caught a flash of running men. The next instant they threw themselves upon me. I went

down under them, fighting and tearing madly at my shirt to get at the dagger I carried in a sheath under my arm, for my sword lay some paces away, but I could not compass it. A hand fastened on my shoulder in a crushing grip. I wriggled forward and set my teeth in the wrist until they met. There was the salt taste of fresh blood in my mouth and I heard a sharp cry from one of my foes. I twisted around until I got one leg free and kicked out with all my might; felt it strike yielding flesh; fought with tooth, shoulder, elbow, fist; heard gritting curses and gasping breaths from my enemies; flattered myself, in the midst of it, that I was giving a good account of myself. But my strength was not equal to it — I was tiring fast with the heavy weight of men upon me.

After a minute or two of this, I felt a heavy blow upon my head, a blinding white light flared before my eyes; and then came the blackness of oblivion.

XX

THE FLIGHT IN THE FOREST

(Continued)

When I again became aware of my surroundings, I still lay in the little glade where I had fallen. My head thumped painfully, and when I attempted to move my hands I found that they were bound behind my back. Near by I could see De Merrillac's body, half buried among the green leaves of the thicket where I had found him. Beyond him a little group of Spaniards, some seven or eight, played at dice on a cloak spread upon the ground, while another burly soldier with a cast in his eye, which gave him a singularly evil look, practised a bewildering series of cuts, thrusts, and parries with my sword. I meditated — after I had estimated my position — as best I could with an aching head and a sore body, upon the unpleasantness of the situation: tried my best to come at a plan of escape. My feet were free, — my one advantage, — and I calculated that my best chance lay in edging my way slowly into the underbrush. Once there, I hoped to outwit my captors by my superior woodcraft and knowledge of the locality. I drew up my legs with infinite caution and thrust myself a few inches in the desired direction. Then I lay still; but the eager gamesters around the cloak

took no notice of me. I repeated this action several times and made good progress, approaching inch by inch my goal, until I began to have a faint hope that I might get clear. But it was not to be.

Of a sudden there came a shout from the capering student-of-arms. He ran to where I lay. One of his fellows soon joined him and they stood staring down at me, grinning maliciously. I glared back fiercely, reflecting the while upon the quickness with which those insolent smiles would be replaced with another kind of look, had I but my hands free and a sword in them. After a time the large man reached down and jerked me roughly to my feet. His companion called sharply to those about the cloak and they got up reluctantly from their game. There was some talk among them, which I could not understand, after which I was placed between two of them and we marched off along the river bank toward the sea. I judged from the position of the sun that it was some two hours after midday, so I had lain for some time insensible. After a half-hour's walk we entered another clearing and halted.

Before me stood Michel Barre! A different Michel Barre, so changed that I wondered at my former blindness, which saw in this one only a fat man with a patch over his eye. Gone was the black, drooping hat, which had softened his bigness into mere obesity; gone was the humility with which he cloaked his sinister spirit; gone were the faded clothes, the livery of poverty; but the irony still gleamed as sardonically as ever from his eye. The hard line of the bright morion

across his face brought into prominence the harsh, powerful lines of his features, while the straight, shining cuirass about his thick body gave him an unexpectedly martial appearance. A cold smile replaced the obsequious grin of other days. He surveyed me in silence for some little time. I looked about eagerly and discovered Marie, bound and gagged, lying at some distance upon the ground. He intercepted my glance and laughed.

"Ah, yes, the little lady: an interesting toy for the captain — a love-bird for his leisure."

This remark so enraged me that I struggled fiercely to break the bonds that held my wrist.

"You dastardly traitor!" I burst out. "You — "

He interrupted me in a suave way, although there was an ominous light in his eye as he did so. "How well De Tanqueray named you when he called you the Scarlet Cockerel! Cockerel you still are, although perhaps not so scarlet as formerly, but foolish as ever. I would call your attention to one thing, Master Cockerel: you are in a bad position to be casting hard names."

"True names, though!" I answered stoutly. "You betrayed us, you Judas! Sold us — "

"Hold! Hold!" he said furiously. "My mother was a Spanish woman and I am a loyal son of Holy Church. Make what you can of that! I served under Pedro Menendez ere you were whelped, puppy! What are a few Huguenot dogs to me? I count it a grace to have been in at the death." He laughed. "But why should I justify myself to you? Now that

I have you, I shall require from you a piece of information that I have long wanted."

"The great secret that I am supposed to possess, eh?" I asked. He showed no surprise at my use of the word "secret."

"That you do possess," he corrected me. "Yes, that is it. So it was you that day who surprised us — Pierre and me. Well, I thought as much at the time."

"And if I do not produce this information — the secret? What then?"

"Then you shall taste such tortures as will make the lot of poor damned souls in hell seem a bed of roses," he replied icily. "And if that does not bring about the result I wish, I have another idea." He glanced, as he spoke, toward the spot where my lady lay.

I shuddered inwardly, but said nothing. I knew he meant to put her to the torture, if he could not force what he wanted from me, in the hope that her sufferings would accomplish his end. He approached quite close to me and eyed me steadily, while I gave him back hard look for hard look.

"The information I desire is the hiding-place of the Bennoni treasure," he said quietly.

I must have looked at him in such blank amazement as to convince him for an instant of my complete and sincere ignorance, my absolute failure to understand what he was talking about; for I saw a look of fear in his bloodshot eye, quickly blotted out by a glare of uncontrollable rage.

"The Bennoni treasure!" he shouted. "My own

treasure, that your father stole from me so foully! Where is it?"

"You lie, you dog!" I thundered. "My father — "

"Jesu! Jesu! The garrote, Juan!" he cried to one of the soldiers who stood looking curiously at us. "Madre di Dios! I'll waste no more time with you, you silly fool! I'll wring it out of you!"

The man to whom he had spoken produced a bowstring from a leather pouch hanging at his belt and twisted it dexterously into a loop, calling at the same time to his companions. Two of them ran up and took their places on either side of me, gripping me strongly by the arms, while the first man came up behind and slipped his cord down over my head until it rested just above my eyes. At a sign from Michel Barre he began to tighten it.

"You'll get nothing from me, you sneaking murderer," I said, "for I know nothing of any treasure. But be assured, if you kill me, there are those that will pay you out in the same coin, and with interest."

"I will make you pray for death before I am through with you," he answered.

And now I began to feel the cord in good earnest, as the pressure tightened about my head, but as yet was able to bear it without flinching. At another signal from that one-eyed fiend, who watched me so calmly, it was taken up another turn, until my forehead seemed gripped in a band of living flame; sweat started upon my shaken body; and it was only with difficulty I restrained the cry that came up in my throat. But I set my teeth and held on. Another

sign from fat Michel — another twist of the tourniquet! I prayed earnestly to God for strength to endure the hideous racking which now tore my body and turned my bones to water. My brain seemed on fire; great waves of throbbing pain shook me; my knees wavered uncertainly under me; the intent, cruel face of my enemy seemed to swell to enormous size. In spite of me, a groan burst from my lips; my legs melted away under me and I knew no more.

When I came to my senses, it was dark. I lay near a small fire which glowed red in the gloom, lighting with intermittent flickers the high-curving arch of boughs above and gleaming softly on the armor of the soldiers disposed around it. Some distance away I could see Michel Barre staring moodily into the fire, while the huge Spaniard who had appropriated my sword sat near, with the old blade lying by his side. I looked around for Marie and saw her, indistinctly, in the outer circle of radiance cast by the fire. She moved slightly and my heart bounded with relief that she lived; for I put nothing past the devil incarnate that I now knew inhabited the body of Michel Barre.

My arms were numb from the tightness of the cords which encircled them, and I endeavored to ease them by changing my position. My head was sore from the blow I had received and ached yet from the torture of the garrote. At my first movement Michel Barre strode abruptly across the circle of firelight to where I lay. He stood looking down at me for some time without speaking. Then he turned and gave a command to one of the men beside the fire, and presently a piece

of cold meat was brought me, with water in a leathern cup. My arms were loosed and my legs bound, while I attacked the meat with relish and cooled my parched throat with the water. As I ate, Michel Barre watched me without comment; but when I had finished he sat down facing me.

"Let us converse, Monsieur de Breault," he said civilly enough. I started to speak, but he held up a silencing hand, so I held my tongue and waited for him to continue.

"The exact state of affairs," he went on, "is this: We have captured Fort Carolin and put all those in it to the sword, except some forty who were hanged this morning — "

I exclaimed in horror.

" — with a placard above them," he went on, without notice of my interruption, "on which our captain caused to be written these words: 'This is done not as to Frenchmen, but as to Lutherans and heretics.' Some few escaped on a leaky caravel which lay in the river. I have, then, only Monsieur Belcastel to reckon with — a bold and valiant man, aye, and a clever one, but the odds are too great against him. I fear him not. So you see you may expect no succor in your present situation. Monsieur Ribault is out of the question, of course, for he will be destroyed — perhaps is destroyed by this time. I have a respect for your courage, monsieur, and have no desire to torture further a brave man. Let us come, then, to a compromise, like men of wit."

"Nay, there can be no peace between you and me,

Michel Barre," I interrupted, with intent to anger him. "No peace between any honest man and such as you."

"Do you flatter yourself that I fear war, puppy?" he asked, with a grim smile. "Reflect upon the consequences of a refusal, monsieur. We shall try in the morning if we cannot roast out of you the secret of the hiding-place of the Bennoni treasure. And failing that, there is still the little lady there. You will think twice, eh, ere you allow us to crush her tender flesh?" With that parting shot, he arose and left me.

In a short time a soldier came and bound my arms again. Soon the little camp composed itself to slumber, leaving the tall man with a cast in his eye as sentry. He brooded beside the dying fire, half asleep, I thought, while I stared, wakeful, making endless, desperate, impossible plans for escape, at the lofty branches high above, just discernible in the failing glow of the firelight. The men clustered about the embers for warmth and fell quickly into sleep; but Michel Barre paced for a long time up and down between the fire and me, planning no one knows what evil things for the next day; a sinister colossus of a man, whose shadow crossed and recrossed my face with unfailing regularity each time he made a turn. At last, after a glance at me, he stretched himself upon the ground and fell asleep in no time; a thing at which I marveled, for had I such crimes as he upon my conscience, I think I had never slept again.

Time dragged itself along; the drowsy guard scarce moved; the camp was still, except for an occasional

movement or muttering among the slumbering soldiers. I alone was wide awake, staring hopelessly into the high black void of the heavens, where I could see a lone star shining softly through an opening in the foliage. I went over in my mind the events of the afternoon. Martin had guessed rightly — this was some old quarrel bequeathed to me by my father. I wondered, though, that he had not spoken of it. Perhaps he had thought it would die with him. I considered my position, and the more I turned it over in my mind, the more desperate it appeared to me. It was only to Martin Belcastel that I could look for help, — Michel Barre had spoken truly, — and I knew not if Martin were alive or dead. If he still lived, I was sure he would make an attempt at rescue; but against ten men I had no hope of success. The presence of Marie made the problem doubly hard. As I thought of her, I strained about until I could see her. Either the light had dwindled considerably or she had moved, for she was barely visible in the darkness.

My restlessness aroused the sleepy sentinel, who arose, came over and examined the bonds which held me. Some minutes after he had resumed his seat, I saw a slight movement in the bushes across the glade in the direction in which I was facing. Hope leaped in my heart, and I waited breathlessly for whatever was to come next. But minute succeeded minute, and all remained as before, until I began to fear that my eyes had tricked me. I craned my head about and looked to see Marie among the shadows. The spot where she had been was empty. She was gone!

Once again my heart bounded joyfully; hope had become a certainty; rescue, I was sure, was at hand. Again I saw the soundless quiver of branches in the undergrowth; and this time a copper-colored face was thrust out, with a finger at its lips enjoining silence. The Deer! I had forgotten him; but, thank the good God, he had remembered me. The big Spaniard sat up and glanced sleepily around; the face vanished instantly, without a sound. My heart was in my mouth for fear the sentry would mark Marie's absence; but evidently he noticed nothing amiss; he soon sank back again into his former lethargy. I waited.

Michel Barre moved in his sleep, and turned his big body, so that he had but to open his baleful eye to look me fairly in the face. An hour passed and nothing happened; I judged it to be well past midnight. The guard still dozed by the fire. I gazed unhappily at my sword, which lay beside him on the ground. It must have been the curiously carved hilt which attracted him. I feared that a change of sentinels might be near; a new one would be more alert.

Just at that moment I felt the pressure of a body against my back and the light pressure of a hand on my shoulder; the cords which bound my wrists sprang apart; there was a momentary fumbling at my ankles and they were loosened. The light touch on my shoulder steadied me as the blood began again to flow into my numbed hands and wrists, with an almost intolerable prickling and aching. Then it was removed; there was a slight rustling, and I knew that my rescuer

had withdrawn himself. I looked in Michel Barre's direction just in time to see his eye unclose with a slow lift of the heavy lid. I closed my own and lay quiet; but when I opened them again he was gazing at me intently. He started to rise, and I knew the game was up.

I gathered myself together and sprang to my feet. In one short rush I was upon the sentry and had overturned him, so that he fell with a yell of rage and pain into the searing coals of the fire. By this time Michel Barre had gained his feet and was bearing down on me with incredible quickness, fully awake. I snatched up my sword and struck at him, but the blow went wild and I missed him — my arm, half-dead from its long confinement, had lost its cunning. I turned and ran into the jungle behind me.

I had gone but a few paces into the forest when Martin's familiar voice cried, "This way, Blaise!" His friendly hand grasped my arm and guided me in the dead blackness. My feet prickled unmercifully, but I forced myself to the best speed I could, running thus until the fire-shine was out of my eyes and I could distinguish things about me. Then I fell in behind him.

Far to the rear I could hear Michel Barre's voice bellowing furious orders, and there was a great crashing and crackling of brushwood as the sleepy Spaniards ran this way and that under the scorching tongue of their leader. After some minutes we reached the riverbank, along which we proceeded for some time. Then Martin turned toward the water's

edge, and we came upon a large canoe, in which I could see three vague and shadowy figures. We got into it and made all haste to push off. When the boat had made a dozen lengths, I saw, dimly, a dark form upon the shore.

"We shall meet once more, young Cockerel!" came in a mocking voice over the waters.

"The next time, look to yourself!" I called back across the rapidly growing space between us. "I shall surely kill you, Michel Barre!"

The only answer to this was a burst of laughter.

XXI

A GENTLEMAN DIES FOR HIS FAITH

The caneu moved steadily against the current of the river. Martin had taken the paddle in front; and I knew by the way the boat was handled that the Deer sat in the stern. Marie sat just before me; but the fifth occupant remained a mystery until dawn.

Through the remaining hours of darkness we made the best speed possible. There was no conversation among us; no sound except the regular dip and return of the paddles. A dim sheen of starlight lay on the face of the water, giving an added blackness to the thick woods on either bank. My recent experiences had made me fearful as a girl, and I jumped at every sound from the shore, until at the first graying in the east the Deer turned the caneu toward the shore and drove it into the narrow mouth of a small creek. Marie had long since fallen asleep from sheer exhaustion, and we left her in the boat while we disembarked. It was then that I discovered that the stranger was none other than Mathias Mallon.

Our savage friend soon had a small fire burning, over which we began to broil strips of venison from the haunch of a deer which the Santee produced from the boat; and Martin prepared rough cakes from crushed grain to do duty as bread. When all was ready I awakened Marie. We all sat down cross-

legged about the fire and fell upon the victuals like starving wolves. It was a most heartening meal; it tasted better than many a finer one I have eaten since.

And while we ate, we talked. Marie told us how the Spaniards had come upon Roger de Merrillac in the forest; how he had fought, rocking on his feet from loss of blood, hacked and slashed by the butchers who swarmed about him, crying to her to run for her life. She sobbed in pity as she told it, and wept again, uncontrollably, when I described her father's death, which I did as compassionately as I could, for I felt that it would console her that he went to his death as an honorable and brave gentleman, defending his hearthstone. Mallon, it seemed, had been stunned by a musket ball that grazed his skull, and passed over for dead by the invaders.

Upon regaining his senses he had made his escape from the fort by crawling, assisted by the confusion of the first few hours of Spanish occupancy, wandered for hours in the forest without any sense of direction, and after several times evading the Spanish by the narrowest of margins, had by good luck run across Martin and the Deer.

"And you, Blaise? 'Tis your turn now," Martin said, as he calmly affixed another strip of venison on his dagger point, preparatory to toasting it over the fire. "I saw them put you to the torture, — the cord is a favorite with those fellows, — but I could not hear what went on between you and that fat rascal. I judged, though, that Michel Barre would never kill you until he had gained his end, unless in the heat of

rage, — that was a chance I had to take, — or I had made some shift to save you then. I knew you would never give in at the first shock, son; and if you lived until midnight I foresaw that I might get you off. As it turned out, I was right. Mordieu! But mine is a prodigious emptiness!"

He cut himself another piece of meat and proceeded to cook it, while I gazed admiringly at this amazing man who read so accurately the temper of his fellows.

"The lady proved to be the easy problem, though I had feared that her rescue would give us trouble," he said, glancing obliquely at Marie, who smiled gratefully. "But go on, Blaise! I am curious to know what the great secret was."

"I know no more than I did before," I told him; and related the story of my encounter with Michel Barre, while Martin continued to eat piece after piece of deer meat, so that I believe if my story had taken half an hour more in the telling he would have totally exhausted our larder. He listened, without interruption, to the end.

"Well, I am still as much at sea as ever," he commented at the conclusion of my tale. "There is something queer here. Gervaise was a poor man, was he not, Blaise?"

"To the best of my knowledge," I said, "and I should know, if any."

"Well, God be thanked, we have all come clear," Mallon said devoutly. "That's the main thing."

"But what shall we do in this savage land? Where

shall we go?" asked Marie, in a small, pitiful voice. "There is no place — "

She broke off in the midst of her speech; and by common consent we all looked at Martin. He removed a last small morsel of meat from the point of his poniard, surveyed it regretfully for a moment, and popped it into his mouth.

"I have given the matter considerable thought," he remarked. "My first idea was to join Satouriona again and wait for better times; but now I am of the opinion that if we follow this river until we are far to the southward of the new Spanish fort, of which Monsieur Mallon spoke some days ago, and then go eastward to the sea, we may meet with Monsieur Ribault, waiting there along the coast for a favorable chance to strike the Spanish fleet. What think you of such a plan, mes amis?"

"I like it," I said promptly, "for there lies in the scheme the possibility of escape from this country, which is accursed, I think — for Frenchmen, at least."

"Yes! Yes! Let us get away from here as quickly as we can," said Marie, looking at the grim forest with a shudder.

" 'Tis as good a plan as any," said Mathias Mallon. "There's no one whose judgment I'd trust like yours in this wilderness, messieurs."

So, being happily in accord, Martin explained the result of our council to the Deer, who nodded his head several times, and began without further ado to prepare for the journey. But we rested for some time before continuing up the river; and while Marie and

Mallon slept I learned from Martin the story of his movements since we had parted the day before: how he had seen the Deer on the river and joined forces with him; discovered Mallon, wandering dazed and muttering in the jungle; found De Merrillac's body and, by following the trail of the party that had taken me, discovered the peril with which I was threatened. Then the three of them had concerted the plan of rescue, which they had afterward carried out. It was the Deer who got Marie away. Later, he wriggled and rolled his way to where I lay in the full glare of the fire, cut my bonds, and made his way straight back to the caneu, so, in case it was too near a thing, he could put off without Martin and me, to meet us later at a rendezvous they had appointed. Thus again I had that remarkable man, who had been a second father to me, to thank for my life. But he would have none of my gratitude; and waved me away in that rough manner he assumed when most moved.

We traveled, as Martin had planned, upstream for four days without haste. Journeying thus, without the fatigue of walking, Marie regained her strength, as did we all, for that matter, and took a considerable interest in the life of the wild things along the river: she exclaimed with pleasure when we surprised a band of deer drinking; drew back in disgust whenever she caught sight of one of those repulsive armored reptiles which inhabited these waters in such great numbers. She constantly called our attention to the blue herons, fishing patiently in the marshes, the rose-colored ones in heavy flight, the smaller, snowy-

white birds with tufts upon their heads, plumed knights of the forest, and the ungainly antics of the pelicans, with their large pouches full of fish. And there were other lesser birds innumerable, to delight her, bright-hued, flashing like gems above the sombre river, waking us at daybreak with their twitterings. These things so engaged her fancy that the terrible pain of her father's death faded a little from her mind. She grew more deeply into my heart with each passing hour; but I realized that this was no time to plead my cause, surrounded as we were with every sort of peril, which made it unlikely that we should ever come through alive.

On the fifth day we hid our canoe safely and struck off into the forest toward the east but, owing to the position of the marshes and the river, we were forced after some hours to bear in a more southerly direction. The marching was hard. I helped Marie over the hard places; carried her, with a thrill in my heart, through the dark pools and small streams that barred our way; smoothed the path for her, as best I could, through the almost impenetrable jungle. It was heavy labor, at times, to cut and slash a path for ourselves through the matted and interwoven mass of wiry growths which surrounded us on all sides; but for three days we met no one, nor anything untoward. On the third evening we came to an arm of the sea that extended inland for some distance, and we lay that night some leagues from the coast, continuing in the morning on our way to the ocean.

At mid-morning we approached a long point of

land, which thrust itself out into the water. It was heavily wooded and hid the sea from our eyes. As we came closer to it the Deer, who was leading the march, turned and cautioned us by a sign to be silent. In the ensuing stillness, I heard the low murmur of voices, the rattle of accoutrements — in fact, the unmistakable sounds made by a large body of armed men. I looked at Martin and he at me. Without words, we crept through the thick fringe of woods, and looked out upon a sight that stunned us with amazement and alarm.

Immediately before us a body of Spanish soldiery was drawn up near the water's edge, standing at ease and talking among themselves. At one side was a little knot of officers; and at some distance from them, with his hand upon his sword, was the Spanish commander, solitary, scanning the opposite shore. It was the same man, that Pedro Menendez whom I had seen upon the deck of the galleon some time before, clad in that same rich armor, with that same haughty bearing, that same harsh face, cold and hard as if cut from marble.

In the estuary a Spanish galleon was anchored. Across the water, upon the low-lying shore, was another body of men who listened to the words of one of their number. The speaker was Jean Ribault; the men, the soldiers and sailors of the French fleet. They were ragged and gaunt, drooping and disheartened, and they listened with downcast eyes to Ribault's words, which we could not hear. After some little time a boat put out from the other shore and came rapidly

toward us. In it were two rowers, and a third man who bore a white flag, which he held up so that all could see it. The buzz of tongues ceased in the Spanish ranks and the messenger landed amid a complete silence.

He walked straight up to the Spanish captain, who awaited him, an austere and impassive figure in gleaming armor.

"Admiral Ribault wishes to know what terms of surrender you will grant if we lay down our arms according to your summons?" asked the envoy in a loud voice, when he had stopped a few paces from Menendez. His words came clearly to us in the still air.

"Here's a pretty coil!" muttered Mallon, while Martin shook his head sorrowfully, and Marie looked at me with big, frightened eyes.

"No terms to heretics and unbelievers," cried the Spaniard sternly in French.

"Will you give us promise of our lives as shipwrecked French mariners? As prisoners of war?" asked the Frenchman.

"I have no quarrel with Frenchmen," replied Menendez calmly. "I will grant mercy — as God may prompt me!"

"Say the Devil, rather," Martin whispered, as the envoy returned to his boat. "I know the school this black dog was taught in. Aye, and his schoolmasters, teachers of subtleties and evasions, liars and hypocrites, who believe that the end justifies any means to reach it. Do you see any mercy in that face? Jean

Ribault had better fight to the death than trust these murderers."

"What, think you, does he mean to do?" I inquired.

"Watch — and you will see a great crime, committed in the name of our sweet Lord." Martin's voice was queer and husky.

With the arrival of the boat on the other side began a conference among the French which lasted for some time. Then there was a movement among them, and a number assembled together near the water's edge, while a much larger number withdrew to a distance and stood there watching the progress of events. Again the boat crossed the inlet, bearing the message that Monsieur Ribault and a number of his men had agreed to surrender; but some three hundred and more had refused to accept the word of any Spaniard. Menendez immediately called a young officer to him, and conversed with him in a subdued voice for some minutes, whereupon the young man shouted a command to the captain of the galleon. In a short time her boats were engaged in ferrying the prisoners across the water. As they landed, those who bore weapons had them taken away and their arms were bound with cords. In the last boat came Jean Ribault and his lieutenant, Monsieur Orthez. They were escorted at once to the spot where Menendez stood awaiting them. Without a word, Ribault drew his sword and tendered it to the Spaniard, who received it in silence. Then he turned about and addressed the prisoners, while two soldiers bound the arms of Ribault and Orthez, as they had those of the others.

"If there are any among ye who are believers in the true faith let them step out and make themselves known."

Twelve Breton sailors came out from the huddled ranks of the French. They were marched away to a station at one side, amid the jeers of their companions.

It was then, I think, that Jean Ribault read his doom in Menendez's stony face. He whirled on his heel to face his fellow prisoners.

"Men, we are about to die," he said, in a clear, tranquil voice.

At that, a gigantic Frenchman, with a touzled shock of brown hair that glinted in the sunlight, burst from the ranks, broke his bonds with a mighty wrench, and ran, all unarmed as he was, straight upon the Spanish ranks. This so astonished the Spaniards that for a moment they did nothing; then several muskets were fired as he crossed the open space between the two bodies of men. He faltered for a moment, but went on. In the next instant he was among them, swinging his long arms with their clenched fists like flails. Name of a name! This was a feat! The smaller Spaniards swayed and circled and eddied about him as he moved among them, penetrating deeper and deeper into their ranks, until at last they pulled him down. That bright brown head disappeared under a writhing, stabbing mass of steel — to rise no more.

"Mon Dieu! There died a man!" whispered Martin, with a sparkle of excitement in his eyes. "See them examine their bruises. And look! By Heaven, one man is down!"

"'Tis my hope that his neck is broken!" put in Mathias Mallon.

Marie was crying softly. The Deer, squatted near us, never took his eyes from the scene.

"I wish time to pray, sir," said Ribault, looking straight into the pitiless face before him. Menendez could not meet that honest gaze: he bowed his head.

Jean Ribault knelt upon the sands, and all of the captives with him. An instant later there rose upon the still air, in a full, steady voice, the words of a psalm, an outcry from the troubled heart of a king encompassed by his enemies, a prayer of old David, the Warrior King of Israel: —

"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?"

A great wave of pity overwhelmed me at this gusty cry of distress, this wail of a bewildered soul to its Father. My eyes were misty with tears. *"How long? How long . . ."* Again I caught the words: *"How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?*

"Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death . . ."

His voice rolled richly, like the sound of music echoing among the sombre arches of a vast cathedral, the cry of a lonely heart ringed round with evil, bowed down with affliction.

" . . . I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.

"I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me."

"Amen!" I said softly. I knew why Jean Ribault

had chosen that psalm — it was the expression of a soul truly great, caught in the ecstasy of a complete resignation: a natural utterance of Ribault's sincere faith, for which he was about to die.

I heard a choking sob beside me and looked up at Martin Belcastel, to find the tears coursing unchecked down his cheeks. The grandeur of his old friend in this hour of trial wrung tears from the iron lids of those eyes that had not felt their salty sting in five-and-forty years.

Ribault arose from his knees, as did his companions, and faced Menendez proudly.

"To your work, sir," he said serenely.

The Spaniard stood for some moments with his arms folded across his breast, considering the man before him. Then he turned away and waved his hand to the officers about him.

Upon that gesture Jean Ribault died.

XXII

WE PUT TO SEA

A Spanish officer stepped forward and thrust his sword deep into the Frenchman's side, while a second stabbed him in the throat.

As if this were a signal, the general massacre began. A volley of musketry was fired by the Spanish soldiers. Across the water, the remaining French gazed at the slaughter, stunned by the calamity.

I grasped my sword and took a step forward; but Martin's steely fingers set themselves into my shoulder in a grip not to be denied.

"Are you mad?" he asked, in a harsh whisper.

"Let us die with them, Martin!"

"Nay, let us live to avenge them," he said, in a softer tone.

So we stood with grim faces and watched the butchery of our countrymen to the bitter end. The whole savage scene was engraved in fire upon my memory. At our feet little Marie lay weeping in heartbreaking sobs, her face hidden in her arms, broken by the bloody horror she had witnessed. Mallon sat wordless, his countenance dark with passion. The Deer, after the stoical manner of his race, made no sign.

Martin alone broke the silence, speaking in an odd croaking voice I could scarce understand.

"Behold them!" he cried, "the knightly caballeros of Spain! You can see, Blaise, it will be a grace in the eyes of God to kill these vermin without mercy. 'Mercy'! If God gives me life, I will so tell the story of the mercy of Pedro Menendez that his name will be a hissing and a scorning to all honest men through the whole world."

By this time it was over. The soldiers, at a word from their officers, began to drag the bodies of the slain to the water and throw them in, and while this was going forward, Martin Belcastel swore a great oath.

"Hear me, O God!" he said, in a terrible voice: "I swear before God, by His cross upon this sword, which has never been stained by dishonor, never to rest from the smiting, never to hold back my hand from the killing, until I have exacted from the bloody dogs of Spain a life for every French life they have taken to-day."

"Amen!" I said again.

And "Amen," said Mathias Mallon.

"Amen also to this," Martin went on, his low voice crackling like a whiplash, his eyes — from which emanated two blazing beams of light, keen and steady as the shining blades of swords — fixed upon the beach: "I swear to take neither rest nor ease until I have come back to this dark and bloody land, which is accursed, and have taken my toll of these fiends of Spain for the black deed they have done this day upon freemen and Frenchmen."

"I swear!" echoed Mallon and I, in the same breath.

Across the estuary the French had begun to throw up earthworks. They were digging hastily, frantically, with swords, daggers, hands — what they could. It was evident that they meant to sell their lives as dearly as possible. We watched them with hope in our hearts.

"Bravo!" said Martin in a low voice. "Here is a proper spirit! Let us join them, messieurs."

" 'Twill take a three-day journey, Martin, but I see nothing else to do. We must go back to the head of the inlet, or at least to some place where we can cross unobserved."

"Right!" exclaimed Mallon, "and we had best be starting."

Thus it was that we started once again upon our wanderings, traveling slowly because of Marie; and, as the fourth day was drawing to its close, we arrived at the half-made trench — to find it empty! Gone were the French, the Spanish, and the galleon, as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up. We looked at each other in hopeless dismay, for we were footsore and weary and bedraggled from the hardships of the past week, and the cheerless prospect filled our minds with forebodings. But we took heart from the fact that there were no signs of battle about the earthworks, and Martin, with his unfailing optimism, reassured us by his opinion that our people had escaped to the southward.

We rested in that vicinity for two days while we replenished our larder. I succeeded in bringing down a fine buck with the Deer's bow, while he provided

shellfish, which made a welcome addition to our table, and other fish of divers queer shapes and colors, to which he added, on the second day, a large bird of bronze hue with a broad-spreading tail, which proved to be a most excellent dish. Martin sat, for the most part, in moody thought upon the beach, with his face turned ever toward the sea, pondering, I thought, upon a plan that would lead us to safety. Marie and Mallon slept, and devoted their time to regaining their strength. All of us kept away from the open, and took our turns at night in mounting guard, to prevent a surprise by the enemy. At last Martin announced it as his opinion that we should proceed to the southward.

"Death lies to the north, that we know. Let us go south then, — that is good sense, eh? — although I see but a slight chance of escape if we go either way. This whole coast is enemy country and we had best leave it soon, or we shall never see France again. Oh, for a boat, that we might make one of the isles that lie southeast, there to await a friendly sail! But keep sharp lookout, so that we be not taken unawares."

For two more days we pushed south along the beaches. The Deer was ever ahead of us, reconnoitering, ranging deep into the forest, which we kept on our right hand. The second day, as we prepared to halt at dusk, we saw the glare of a fire at some distance in the edge of the woods. Martin and the Santee slipped away to reconnoitre, while the rest of us waited, fireless and supperless, for their return. An hour passed; the last light of day faded, and stars

appeared in the sky before Martin Belcastel came back.

"Spaniards," he said, "a corporal and four men. The Deer is keeping watch upon them. I listened awhile to their talk. Those of ours who refused surrender yielded at last and have been spared. I gathered that Monsieur Ribault was wrecked some distance south of where we are now, the day after he left Fort Carolin — you remember the storm? These rascals were left here to look for stragglers, but are taking the opportunity to loot the wrecks. Well, they will find stragglers, and that right quickly — but of a different kind than they expect. We will fall upon these spawn of the Devil and take them at dawn — take them alive, if possible. Then we may find a boat upon the wreck of the Trinity, if she is not too badly broken up, — and put off to a safer shore than this."

An hour before dawn we set forth, leaving Marie hid in a leafy thicket. We took our way noiselessly through the woods, gliding like ghosts from tree to tree, toward the fire, which made a beacon to guide us. As we closed in upon it, we moved with increased caution, worming our way inch by inch, foot by foot, to positions we deemed favorable. From our covert we could make out the motionless forms of four soldiers, rolled in dark cloaks, asleep around the fire, which had died to a dull mass of embers. In the faint glow the fifth man was plainly visible, half asleep, doing but sorry duty as a sentry. After we had lain for some time in our cover, the Deer pointed out to

us their arms, — muskets, swords, daggers, and those leather pouches in which they carry their powder to keep it dry, — partly covered by the sentry's cloak to protect them from the dew, lying just behind him on the ground. Then our savage ally gave us a lesson in stealth, that held me for some minutes in the grip of a breathless wonderment: he stepped out into the firelight directly behind the unsuspecting Spaniard, and stole, without a sound, close upon him. One by one he removed the weapons from the cloak and passed them back to us. Once the soldier stretched his hands above his head and yawned, bringing my heart into my mouth for fear that he would turn and discover the Santee; but the red man stiffened into a statue, shining like bronze where the fire played upon his half-naked body, until the danger was past. When he had completed his work, he returned to a place near us. The muskets we found ready for use, except for the priming, as Mallon called it, which he supplied from one of the pouches.

At daybreak the Spaniard rose stiffly from the ground with the evident intention of arousing his companions. Then we advanced suddenly upon him from the bushes, with the muskets held ready for instant use. At sight of us his jaw dropped. The others sprang to their feet, but they made no further move. The sentry stood motionless, although he still wore the small-arms at his belt.

"Disarm him!" Martin commanded.

Mallon, who was nearest, laid down his musket and walked toward him. In so doing, he inadvert-

ently shielded the Spaniard from our fire, and that worthy realized it at once. The quarters were too close for swordplay, but he drew his dagger in a swift movement and closed with Mallon. Martin and I began to run so that we could get in position to fire, while the Deer held the others quiet with his threatening musket. The Spaniard's poniard flashed aloft, but ere he could strike, Mallon's sinewy hand fastened upon his wrist in a grasp of steel. The Frenchman's right hand rose and fell — once — twice — thrice! The Spaniard sank slowly to his knees.

"Jesu!" he cried in a loud voice, and toppled to the ground. Mallon looked at him for a moment, then knelt and thrust his dagger into the sand to cleanse it of its crimson stain.

"Pretty work!" cried Martin Belcastel.

As soon as we had made sure of our captives, I set off, running back to where Marie awaited us, and found her safe in the place where we had left her, though fearing much for us. We made haste to rejoin our companions; and as we went along, I related to her the events that had just occurred and told her, too, of our plans for the future.

An hour later we were marching southward again. Our prisoners went before us, bearing our burdens, with no very good grace; the Deer ranged ahead, as was his custom; Martin kept a sharp eye on the sea, looking for the wrecks of the French ships. At last we descried the dismasted hull of the Trinity, hanging upon a long bar of sand, not more than an arrow's flight from shore.

At the ebb of the tide we were able to walk almost dry-shod to her side. We saw no small boats on deck; but Mallon, nosing around in the hold, gave a shout, and when we joined him, pointed out to us a spare boat, upon which the ship's carpenter had evidently been at work. It needed but the addition of some boards, a little caulking and pitch to make it seaworthy. By nightfall it was ready for the water. But we had before us the hardest task of all, to hoist it upon the deck and launch it. Most of the next day we labored prodigiously, our prisoners and ourselves; but the sun had set and darkness was falling ere we had it in the water.

The following morning we put to sea.

The four sullen Spaniards pulled at the oars; Martin sat in the stern, facing them, with his naked sword across his knees; while Marie and I, with Mallon, sat in the bow. I made what shift I could for Marie's comfort, disposing around her those of our poor possessions that might be of service to her; I was hopeful that the voyage would be a short one. At the water's edge we bade good-bye to the Deer, who was returning to the Crique village, and Martin presented him with one of the muskets and sufficient ammunition to last him for a long period. Marie was frankly sad at leaving him — we all were. We could see his dark form standing there on the beach for a long time, while we moved slowly to the eastward over a sea as calm as a millpond. At last, he raised his arm in a gesture of farewell, then he turned and plunged into the engulfing depths of the forest.

As the sun rose higher in the heavens, the glassy sea became a sheet of glittering brass, and there arose from its surface an almost intolerable heat. Sweat ran in streams from our bodies and there was never a breath of wind to cool them. We had frequent recourse to the little water-keg we had brought from the Trinity, and at the end of the day I discovered, to my dismay, that its contents were almost gone; still we sighted no land. Martin steered by guess for some islands he remembered to have seen when we first came to the New World; but the second morning dawned, and yet we saw nothing in that great waste of waters — no land, no sail!

It came to me, then, that we had missed the islands!

By noon the water was exhausted. As the day grew, there came upon us the first hard pangs of thirst. There were mutterings among the Spaniards who toiled at the oars: growlings that I could not understand. Martin's face grew grimmer with each passing hour; he watched our prisoners with a gleam in his eye that promised ill for them. Marie had fared better than the rest of us, since I had given her most of my share of the water in addition to her own, and as it drained slowly away, I had slighted the captives at the oars, until with the hard labor at the sweeps they had become desperate. At last one of them made bold to demand water of Martin. He was the largest of the Spaniards, a hardy man, no doubt, but his voice came in a faint whisper from parched lips.

"We must have water!" he cried.

"Row, you dog," said Martin, "else I'll feed you to

the fishes." His eyes glittered fiercely, and there was a note of deadly certainty in his words.

The Spaniard resumed the oar with a wolfish gleam of hatred in his eyes.

We moved on for another day upon that still sea of molten brass, a mere speck upon its boundless breast, going we knew not where. Our lips became black; our tongues swelled until speech was an effort; our bodies ceased to sweat in the baking heat; our skins became so inflamed and tender in the steady rays of that pitiless sun that we were in constant agony. Three or four dark, sail-like fins followed the boat continually. Mallon pointed to them and shook his head.

"A sure sign of death, sailors say," he whispered, in a voice that was a mere croak.

On the morning of the fourth day one of the Spaniards leaped suddenly to his feet and plunged into the sea. The fins disappeared; a few bubbles came to the surface; there was a momentary tinge of red on the water. Nothing more.

Minute by minute, hour by hour, Marie grew weaker. Terror gripped my heart as I watched the light fade from her dear eyes, the life from her tortured body. I faced the hard fact that I was about to lose her. In vain I told myself that I must be cool. I tried the water keg again, but not a drop could I get from it. I busied myself in making her more comfortable with the Spanish cloaks beneath her. All in vain — panic seized me for its own.

I took her hot hand and held it clasped in my own.

"How is it with you, beloved one?" I asked her fearfully.

"I cannot go on in such pain," she whispered. "I fear to leave you, Blaise, — never to see you again, — never to have lived — "

"But you shall live!" I exclaimed huskily. "You must live — to love me! I can't let you go."

"I do love you, Blaise," she whispered again; "there has never been anyone but you."

I took her face, pinched and drawn with suffering, between my hands; looked long into those loving eyes; drank deep of the cup of happiness for one moment; then I died a thousand deaths in the next hour as I saw her fail. I took her at last into my arms, holding her tightly to my breast, with some wild and foolish thought to protect her even from the death that was stealing upon her.

A little later she lost consciousness; and although I implored her to speak to me, she gave no sign that she heard. I prayed earnestly to the good God to spare her. I was helpless, aye, and hopeless. We saw no sail upon the sea; no cloud, with its promise of rain, in the sky; no succor anywhere. There came over my soul a black despair, a fierce hatred for the cruel sea and the blazing sun that had slain my love between them. Hour by hour I felt my strength leaving me; my body shriveled in that awful heat, and I was stricken with piercing pains in my entrails, as if some giant hand were plucking me apart. Martin sat in the stern like a man of steel, his face, from which the flesh had fallen away, as gaunt as a death's-head, his

eyes glowing like a flame from the dark caverns of their sockets under his heavy brows. Terrible eyes they were: bloodshot, red-rimmed, fixed pitilessly on the three Spaniards before him; they were the only part of him that seemed to live.

In the late afternoon the Spaniard who had demanded water of Martin rose suddenly with his oar in his hands and swung it back over his shoulder. Ere he could strike, Mathias Mallon rose likewise to his feet and twisted it from his hand. For an instant he stood there, black against the rosy sky.

Then "Adieu, mes amis, adieu," he said coolly; and he hurled himself upon the Don, twining his lean legs and arms about him. The Spaniard struggled violently to break his hold, but could not. They were precipitated into the sea.

"Dios!" cried the Spaniard. They rose no more.

After that, I think my senses began to leave me, although I can remember that I felt a flicker of life in Marie's still body. The gnawing pain in my vitals grew and grew until I lived in a world of pain. Things became indistinct — I could see Martin's terrible eyes — larger and larger — immense — red, pitiless. Then came the blessed darkness.

BOOK FOUR

THE TABLES ARE TURNED

XXIII

SPANISH TREASURE

The next thing I remember is the sound of voices coming through the blackness as from a great distance, conversing in a language strange to me, but which I knew to be English. Then I heard a loud command shouted above me, the sound of slapping water, the creaking of timbers; and I opened my eyes upon the familiar sight of a ship's cabin. Near by sat two men: one a short, broad man of immense girth, — I discovered afterward he was the ship's surgeon, — the other tall, well formed and ruddy, with close-cropped fair hair and beard, was Captain Fenner of the ship Victory. The latter, upon seeing my eyes open, addressed me in halting French.

"Ah, my boy! You have come around at last? We had almost given you up. Look to him, good Master Porter, for I must get me on deck to see why Tom Swinton has changed our course." With which remark he took himself off, leaving me to the tender mercies of the surgeon.

"How came I here? And am I the only one to come through alive?" I asked weakly. He answered me in very good French.

"Nay, your friend Belcastel is even now pacing the deck, — a man of iron, that one, — and the damoiselle is reposing after her first meal. Ah, that is where the

wind blows? I suspected as much when we picked you up, for no sooner does the damoiselle come back to her senses than she inquires after you, sir."

I heard footsteps approaching at that instant and Master Porter smiled.

"If I mistake not, here comes some broth for you: poor porridge enough for a hungry man, I know; but you have had a very close squeak of it, young Cockerel, and we must go easy."

Just then the door opened, and a lad of some fifteen years came in bearing a bowl of some thin soup which belied its odor, for it was poor weak stuff, although it smelled like a food fit for gods to my unaccustomed nose. Master Porter insisted on feeding me very slowly, for fear, he explained, I should founder myself, as I could very easily do in that condition. At the same time he continued to chatter of our rescue, which I was content to let him do, since I had but little strength to answer him.

"By the Powers!" he cried, "your friend Belcastel is a terrible fellow! When we first sighted your boat at dawn yesterday, he was engaged in a small diversion with the two Spaniards that were rowing it — he has told me the whole story, so I know how you came by those murdering dogs. It was a pretty fight: they were at him with the oars, and he with nothing but his sword. What a devil of a swordsman he is! Where another man would have been put to it to defend himself, Monsieur Belcastel carried the fight right to them, cutting and thrusting like mad, driving them all over the boat, and all three of them so weak they could

scarce stand on their feet. When we were a bowshot away he drove one of them into the sea; but in so doing left himself at the mercy of the other. Before the Spaniard could strike him down, Toby Tyler — the best bowman that ever came out of Devon, I'll tell you, though I wouldn't dare tell Toby, for he thinks overly well of himself as it is — Toby, I say, took the Don clap i' the clout with a good clothyard shaft: a wonderful shot, considering the sharp wind that was blowing! And Toby, a sly dog he is, must needs pretend to bewail the loss of a new shaft, when we praised him for his bowmanship, for the Spaniard followed his mate into the sea to feed the fishes. And Monsieur Belcastel fell down on the bottom of the boat like one dead — we feared we were too late to save him alive. But 'tis a strong man, your friend; and in three hours after we had wet his whistle — "

At this moment there came an interruption to the steady flow of Master Porter's words. I heard rapid footsteps outside the door, and, as it was flung open, a resounding voice exclaiming, "Blaise, my son, my son!"

I sat up with a great effort, and an instant later was clasped in Martin Belcastel's strong arms, so affected I could not speak; I only smiled foolishly at Master Porter, who beamed upon us from across the cabin.

By late afternoon I was on deck. The pleasant air assisted me in recovering my strength, but was hastened most by my reunion with Marie. We paced the deck together for a short space, amid the friendly

smiles of the English seamen, ere she returned to the cabin assigned to her by Captain Fenner.

During the next few days I was puzzled by the strange actions of this English captain, for he changed the course of the ship divers times each day, and kept up a constant anxious lookout. The Victory swept the seas like a coursing hound, back and forth, from north to south, from south to north, in a fruitless quest, until I became curious to know for what they were so carefully searching. I applied to Martin for information.

" 'Tis a Spanish treasure-ship they seek," Martin said, "and 'tis my hope they find it. I ask nothing better than to measure swords with these Dons on equal terms. This is the ship Captain Hawkins left behind for refitting, and it seems that while in Havana they learned of the galleon, Doña Maria, which was to sail about this time for Spain, laden with gold and precious stones. Captain Fenner, who is an ambitious and able mariner, at once conceived the plan of capturing her. 'Twill be a fine feather in his cap to take a plate-ship into Southampton! Aye, and it will salve somewhat the soreness of my heart to slay a few of the Spanish vermin."

"No doubt Captain Hawkins left this vessel behind for this very purpose," I said, "although I had thought England and Spain were at peace with each other."

"So they are," Martin answered. "But these Spaniards have waxed so fat and rich by their conquests that the whole world is ready to spring at their throat

like hounds on a rabbit. A hardy rabbit, eh? Such a feat as Fenner proposes will but cause the Queen of England to wink her eye in public and reward him in private. 'Tis said that she loves a gallant sailor! More man than woman!"

The days passed without incident. I recovered my gaiety among the bluff spirits of the ship's company, and Marie became herself again: the bloom came back to her cheeks, and the life to her racked body. Imagine, my friends, the joy I felt at finding my adored lady once more by my side; the peace that came to me after the struggles and alarms of the days just past; the serenity of long sunny days spent in a sweet communion with the chosen of my heart!

Then, at mid-morning of a fair day, we sighted a sail far to the southwest. Immediately I heard the roar of Captain Fenner's voice as he began to shout his commands; all sail was made on the Victory and she ran on a course that would cross the stranger's bows. As we neared her, we saw that she flew the hated flag of Spain. The black figures of men bustled about her decks, which towered far above ours, or clustered around the shining culverins and cannon. On the high deck at the stern stood the Spanish captain, alone, his standard planted by his side.

When we were still a cannon-shot away there came a puff of white smoke from her forward deck and a dull report. A ball flew high above us and plunged into the sea beyond. Toby Tyler and the other archers howled with glee.

Martin laughed contemptuously. "If they gather

treasure no better than they serve their ordnance," he commented, "Captain Fenner is like to get nothing for his pains."

A few moments later the Victory ran close upon the galleon, and the deck beneath us trembled with the violent concussion, as our ordnance spoke in its turn. So close were we that it was impossible to miss. The iron balls tore great gaps in her sides, splintering her timbers in a dozen places as we passed on. In the light breeze our smaller vessel outsailed the Spaniard a cable's length in every three; and ere she could manœuvre her ponderous bulk into a position to fire upon us, we had come about and were running down upon her again.

"A sweet ship, and nimble as a lass at the dancing," said our captain's deep voice, pridefully.

This time we passed upon the enemy's other side; but they were ready for us, and as we came abreast of them the cannon of both ships thundered at the same time, with such a loud noise that I clapped both hands to my ears. Again we hulled them; but their culverins, so high above us, did little damage except to bring about our heads a shower of splinters from the masts and spars above. One large piece did send a burly Englishman sprawling, which so enraged him that he leaped to his feet and shook his fist at the Spaniard, at the same time cursing his enemies heartily. From the raised decks, fore and aft, the English bowmen poured a hail of death into the crowded waist of the Doña, to which the Spanish musketeers replied, with but little effect.

As we prepared to come about for the second time, a single cannon was fired from the after deck of the Doña Maria. The ball struck our deck near where Captain Fenner stood with Martin and me; a heavy fragment of timber flew upward and struck the Englishman across the forehead, so that he fell; but ere Martin or I could reach him he was up again, furious, blood running from a wound across his brow.

"Curse his infernal impudence!" he roared. "We'll board him!"

Then to the crew in a ringing command: "Prepare to lay aboard her, men!"

There was a great answering shout from his seamen. Martin and I were ready with our swords.

A few moments later the Victory lay close alongside the Spaniard, and a dozen English sailors had boarded her, bearing ropes, with which they intended to bind the ships together. There was a heavy fire from the muskets of the Spaniards and a sharp struggle at the bulwarks of the galleon, until Fenner, Martin, and others made such terrible play with their swords that the English cleared a space for themselves and obtained a foothold. I was swept away from Martin's side in the rush of the fight, and found myself at the foot of the ladder leading to the forward deck. Above me the Spanish musketeers had thrown away the old weapons and taken to swords, for Toby Tyler was in their midst, a veritable giant of a man, with flaming red hair and beard, swinging a short-handled axe. He wielded his weapon with dreadful effect, yelling and laughing like a madman as he saw

the smaller men give back before the dripping blade. The deck about him was a crimson shambles; the Spaniards shrank before him as he advanced, clambering over the rail to drop into the waist below. I ran up the ladder and made my way along the rail to cut off their retreat; but as I engaged a short powerful fellow with a green-leather baldric stretched across his broad chest, my foot slipped in the welter of blood under my feet and I fell to the deck, escaping thus the swift blow he aimed at me. As I arose, I thrust him through the belly; but ere I could fully recover I found myself clasped tightly in the arms of a second man who had come up behind the first. My sword was wrenched from my hand in the struggle that followed; I went down again. But hardly had I struck the planks, when I felt my captor's grip relax, and saw his grinning face fall apart, as Toby's axe shore neatly through steel cap, bone and brain. By the time I had thrown him off, four other bowmen had joined us and the foredeck was cleared.

I recovered my sword and ran to the rail overlooking the waist of the ship. There a great press of Spaniards stood solidly against the English, while the captain of the galleon directed the fight from the after deck. Captain Fenner and his sailors ran hardily upon them, while off to the right Martin Belcastel raged among them like a lion. His left arm hung limp by his side; his face was set and passionless; but his eyes glowed ferociously, and his sword made a shining circle of death about him as it flickered and played among the terror-stricken men before him

in such a burst of fence as transcended even Martin's own self. He directed his course toward the stair which led to the after deck, and it flashed upon me that he intended to have for himself the honor of killing or capturing the Spanish commander. I glanced about and saw that by descending from the foredeck upon the starboard side we could take the enemy in the rear. Toby and his fellows were at the ladder, about to go down and join the fight in the waist, when I shouted to them and pointed to the clear space in the rear of the Spanish ranks. In an instant they were at my side. Another moment sufficed for our descent to the lower deck, behind the unsuspecting Spaniards.

At my signal we fell upon them in a body with a mighty shout. Axe and sword began again their deadly work, as we hewed our way, amid cries of alarm and howls of agony, into the close-packed waist of the Doña Maria. For a little time they stood to it; then broke before us, some running to hiding-places about the ship, some endeavoring to board the Victory, where they were met by those left aboard her and made captive; but the greater number threw down their arms and submitted.

And so the tumult died.

By this time Martin Belcastel was facing the Spanish captain on the high deck at the stern of the galleon. The Spaniard stood still, with sword and dagger, awaiting Martin's attack.

"Prepare to die, sir!" said Martin, with his habitual calmness, testing the temper of his red sword against

the deck. Only the implacable gaze of his eyes told of the fiery hatred that burned in his breast.

The Spaniard surveyed the sorely battered Doña Maria, the crimson, reeking decks, the triumphant English, with a sad smile.

He raised his sword to the salute. "'Twould suit me well, sir," he said; and engaged sharply.

"The Don is no match for him," remarked Captain Fenner to me in his faltering French. "For that matter, who is? A school-man is like a baby in his hands. There! Did I not tell you? He runs like water around the Spaniard — ah!"

Martin made three passes of great swiftness; at the fourth his opponent's blade left his hand, described a great arc in the air, and fell near the bulwark some distance away. The Spaniard folded his arms upon his steel-clad breast and waited with composure for death.

Martin lowered his weapon. "Take up your sword, sir," he said. "Corbleu! I have never yet killed an unarmed man. I find I cannot — even when I would."

The Spaniard turned and walked to where his sword lay. "'Tis a gallant act, monsieur, and it beseems you." He picked up the weapon, snapped it across his knee and tossed the two pieces over the side. "But it is not fitting that a knight of Spain should be beholden to a robber for his honor."

As he spoke he mounted to the bulwark.

"Adios, señors all!" he said in a clear voice. "May God receive my soul!"

Before anyone could move, he stepped off into the sea. Weighted as he was with armor, he sank like a stone. Martin ran to the rail and stared for a moment at the spot where his enemy had gone down; he shook his head sorrowfully, and joined me in the waist. "A proud and brave cavalier," was his only comment.

We returned then to the Victory, where I hastened to reassure Marie as to our safety. I came upon her standing by the mainmast.

"Blaise," she said, "I did fear for you greatly; but you fought more gallantly than any."

I took her hand in mine and gazed deep into her eyes, unreasonably happy at her praise; yet certain that I did not deserve it.

"Did you not see the great fight Martin Belcastel made?" I asked.

"Nay," she said simply. "I saw only you." And those few words thrilled me more than the commendation I afterward received from Martin and Captain Fenner.

Master Porter was busy for some days attending on the wounded, and I am sure his cheerful talk had as much to do with their recovery as did his surgery and herbs. Martin's arm was not seriously hurt and it healed rapidly. The work of repairing the ships and transferring the great treasure on the Doña Maria to the Victory went forward handily; and the next afternoon saw both vessels started on the long voyage to England.

The way seemed endless, for the Doña Maria was a sluggish vessel and made slow work of it, while the

Victory was sprightly at the sailing, and so was forced to reduce her speed, to accommodate her pace to that of her prize.

For several days the weather remained warm and pleasant. The days, sunny and quiet, brought peace to our hearts, sore with the strife and stress of the weeks just past; at night the mysteries of the remote, starlit heavens above us, the monotonous lap and whisper of waters against the stout planking of the ship, the musical hum of wind through the rigging, soothed our minds, exhausted by constant watchfulness. We paced the deck each night, Marie and I, silent for the most part in a happy companionship; but sometimes Martin joined us and talked gravely of the future, — with a twinkle in his eye, — or Captain Fenner took a few turns about the deck with us. Twice Toby Tyler came up to us, and had such difficulty in shortening his long stride to Marie's short step that he roared with laughter at the mincing figure he made. Ah, messieurs, the Victory will ever occupy a corner of my heart; for it was upon her staunch deck that we formally plighted our troth one night, pledged to each other an eternal love, planned our future — all to the soft harmony of wind and water.

On a bright, brisk day in February we sailed at last into Southampton, where we were fêted, feasted, and made much of for two days by the townspeople. So highly did Captain Fenner speak of our part in the taking of the Doña Maria, we could scarce walk down the street that we were not shaken by the hand or invited to refresh ourselves with the bitter ale the

English love, until Martin remarked sourly to me that he was no longer a man, but an ale barrel.

Ere we left Southampton we were presented with fifty English pounds each, as our share of the treasure of the Spanish galleon. This was a kind of praise we could appreciate, since, for the time, we were both absolutely penniless.

XXIV

THE ROAD TO MONT-DE-MARSAN

A FEW days later we were set ashore from a coasting vessel at the port of Bordeaux; and a great gladness arose in my heart as I set my foot once more on the soil of my native land, heard about me the honest sound of my own language, saw on every side the familiar faces of my compatriots. Upon my word! I could scarce keep from singing in my joy.

Marie had managed for herself a change of clothing while in England; but Martin and I, in our torn, stained buckskins, with our sun-browned faces, with our swords in worn and battered scabbards by our sides, drew the curious stares of the crowd as we passed up the street from the quay to the inn. Martin immediately despatched a messenger bearing a letter to Nicolas in Paris, filled with a variety of instructions; and we lay at the inn for some days in good comfort, awaiting the arrival of Nicolas.

I was not surprised, therefore, at awakening one morning to the sound of a flat voice, saying, "Good morning, Master Blaise! 'Tis above an hour after sunrise, and Monsieur Martin awaits you."

"Good morning, Nicolas," I said, "how glad I am to see you!"

"And I you, monsieur," he replied. "I had almost given up hope of ever seeing my master and you again.

What adventures you must have had in that strange land!" His eyes sparkled; I suspected that he regretted missing the expedition.

Upon arising I found that my old deerskins had disappeared. A new suit of scarlet velvet had taken their place, a cap to match, with a black feather, and new shoes, to which was added a new green sheath for my sword. I learned from Nicolas that this was the result of Martin's thoughtfulness. When I entered the common room of the inn I found my lady awaiting me, as well as Martin; and we all sat down to a breakfast that began more cheerfully for me than it ended; for I found that Martin had announced to Marie's uncle her safe return to France, whereupon Monsieur le Comte de la Costa had immediately sent horses and men to escort her to his house in Paris. This cast me down exceedingly, as you may imagine, for she had become so dear to me, my lovely lady, that I desired never to be separated from her again — wished, indeed, to proceed straight to Paris and present to Monsieur le Comte my claim for her hand in marriage. Marie herself advised against such a course, telling me that her uncle was a kindly man, but of a touchy temper, and that a too sudden pressing of my suit would meet with a rebuff.

Martin suggested then that he and I make a journey to Breault; see that all was well there; and on our way back to Paris stop for a day at his small estate near Dijon.

"Such a plan," he concluded, "will give my friend Monsieur le Comte sufficient time to accustom himself

to the idea of your coming — which he will need, no doubt; for you must remember, Blaise, that you are poor in the goods of this world and no great match for a De la Costa." He smiled as he spoke and glanced banteringly at Marie.

"I care nothing for that," she answered proudly.

"But Monsieur le Comte, your uncle, may desire to be informed upon these matters," Martin said seriously. "And I fear that Master Blaise has little to offer; for the Breaults, though of ancient and honorable lineage, are like all Gascons, richer in valiant deeds and hard knocks than in gear and goods — eh, Blaise?"

I agreed, gloomily. After some further talk it was agreed that we should do as Martin suggested.

An hour later Marie and I parted, with tears on her part and misgiving on mine. I gazed miserably at her straight, slender figure, swaying on the back of a black Andalusian genet, among the broad forms of her escort, until they turned the corner at the end of the street. There was a flash of a white hand and she was gone. Shortly afterward, Martin and I, with Nicolas, took the road to Mont-de-Marsan. From there we meant to go to Pau in Béarn, and thence to Breault, which lay midway between Pau and Tarbes, a matter of four leagues from either town.

We traveled slowly, — my thoughts were despondent and I had no interest in anything about me, — and lay that night at an hostel some twelve leagues from our starting-place. The next morning we were early on the road, intending to sleep that night at

Pau. All the morning we rode at a sharp foot-pace between well-ordered farms and vineyards, until near noon we descried in the distance the roofs and spires of Mont-de-Marsan. A little later, after rounding a sharp turn in the road, we came upon another traveler bound in the same direction as ourselves.

As we came up behind him, Martin suddenly spurred his horse and rode abreast of the stranger.

He was an extraordinary person, this horseman. Of rather squat stature, his was yet a commanding figure. His shoulders were tremendously thick, broad, and powerful, his chest deeply arched, while his hands and feet were well and delicately formed, pointing to gentle birth. That he was a Gascon I did not doubt, for he had the breadth of face, the prominent jaws, and long thrust of nose that distinguish my people throughout France. His bright brown eyes were small and widely set; his crisp curling hair, where it showed below his cap, was the blue-black of a raven's feather and slightly grizzled at the temples. His attire was forest green; and a long sword with a richly chased hilt hung at his side. His whole appearance was that of a man of might and consequence.

He turned in his saddle and looked at Martin inquiringly as the latter drew abreast of him.

"Faith! I thought I could not be mistaken," said Martin joyfully. "I'll swear there's not another such a pair of shoulders in all France. 'Tis Dominic de Gourges, or I'll never trust my eyes again!"

The stranger stared hard at Martin for an instant,

then his face broke into a flashing smile, displaying two rows of strong, white teeth.

"By our Lady! Martin Belcastel!" he cried in a deep voice. "Or is it your ghost? I heard of your death in the Floridas from — from — well, it escapes me now who told the tale — "

"But you see me very much alive, eh?" said Martin, with a chuckle. " 'Twas most evidently a falsehood."

"And I am glad that it was," remarked De Gourges gravely. "For it is seldom, now, that I meet with a friend of my youth. You may imagine how you gladden my eyes, mon cher Martin."

Martin presented me to his old comrade. "Monsieur de Gourges is a worthy pattern for a young man — a lion in war — eh, Dominic?"

"Oh, as to that," replied Monsieur de Gourges, "I am sure that Monsieur de Breault has had, in you, a teacher unsurpassed."

Monsieur de Gourges continued with great good-humor. "I remember your father well, monsieur. I learned of his death more than a year ago. God rest his soul! He was a gallant man."

Before I could speak he turned to Martin again. "I eat my heart out in idleness here, Martin Belcastel," he cried. "I sit here and vegetate in the midst of peace, too much peace, and I grow rusty. I have not drawn sword for above a year. I ruffle it with my neighbors, carry things with a high hand, but they are a poor lot, with never a good fight in the whole of them. I am not so fortunate as you, who rove at will about the world, seeking adventure."

"Why not go out with the Guises killing Huguenots?" asked Martin dryly. "Or with Coligny to slaughter Catholics, if that be your faith?"

De Gourges' face darkened. "Nay," he answered. "I am a good Catholic. 'Twas the faith of my fathers, and I hold by it; but these Huguenots are Frenchmen and — by our Lady! I'll never draw blade to kill my own countrymen. 'Tis against nature — Nom de Dieu! I think the world has gone mad."

We rode in silence for a few minutes, Martin with a half-smile on his usually impassive countenance, Dominic de Gourges frowning blackly, in moody thought. After a time his face cleared and he turned again to Martin and me.

"Tell me of your adventures in the New World, messieurs. I'll wager 'tis a wondrous tale to pass an hour or two. A curious strange place, this New World? It is my design some day to go there."

So Martin told him the tale much as I have set it down here, with occasional comments on my part, except that he did boast at great length upon my prowess, until I could hardly face Monsieur de Gourges for very shame. But the story was no more than half told when we passed through the environs of Mont-de-Marsan and entered the town itself. Then De Gourges interrupted Martin.

"You must dine with me, mes amis," he cried. "We will go to the Five Soldiers, where they cook wondrous well and have a wine from Champagne of good flavor. There we can have the balance of your adventure. Faith, I would not miss it for a kingdom!"

We repaired then to the inn, where Monsieur de Gourges gave his orders to the landlord, who received them with the utmost respect; and after waiting for some little time we sat down to an enormous repast of fish, game, and meats, followed by conserves and other sweetmeats, all washed down with several bottles of the wine De Gourges had mentioned. And there Martin continued his narrative. When he told of the massacre at Fort Carolin, De Gourges' face grew black as a thundercloud; and when Martin described the death of Monsieur Ribault and his men, the lightnings of his wrath flashed vividly in his brown eyes. He sprang to his feet and brought his hard fist crashing down among the cups and dishes upon the table. They danced and rattled.

"Nom d'un nom de Dieu!" he thundered. "Shall these dogs of Spain go on forever preying upon the whole world? Are they grown so mighty that no one can pull them from their high seat? Are Frenchmen dogs, then, that those sons of hell may kill them without rhyme or reason? They shall pay dear for each French life they took that day. I say it — I, Dominic de Gourges!"

There was a stir among the other diners at these bold words, uttered as they were in a loud and threatening voice. Martin sat quietly in his place at table and said nothing; but there was a queer light in his eyes as he replied after a while: "Aye, they were Frenchmen, Jean Ribault and his men — but heretics."

"Oh, Monsieur Ribault! I knew him not, but he was my countryman!" cried De Gourges. "Be his

faith what it may, old or new, that matters not; he was a son of France, aye, and a valiant one, Mordieu! Shall these Spanish vermin slaughter our countrymen at their convenience and pay no price for their pleasure? We are cowards if we do not avenge them!"

"Beyond a doubt, you are right, mon cher Dominic," said Martin softly, with a faint smile. "But this is hardly the place to discuss such a matter. This idea will have to be handled with caution, else it might come to the ears of the Court, who would hardly countenance a move to avenge a few rebellious heretics."

"Aye, you are right, Martin," assented Monsieur de Gourges moodily.

"Something might be arranged," Martin went on, after a short silence. "However, it will require thinking. 'Twould be best, I think, to appoint a meeting between ourselves in some quiet place, where we can talk the matter over without too many curious ears about us."

"Why not Breault?" I asked, in a low voice. "There is a retired spot where we are in no danger of being spied upon."

"Good!" said Martin. "The seventh day after this one, Dominic? Will that suit your pleasure?"

"Agreed!" cried Dominic de Gourges.

"Breault," I began, "lies — "

"Nay, lad," interrupted De Gourges, "no need to direct me. Gascony is as well known to me as my own courtyard. I shall be there — never fear."

A short time later we bade Monsieur de Gourges

adieu and took the road to Pau. The afternoon was well advanced when we started and we were forced to push our horses briskly to reach Pau ere darkness set in. We had little time for conversation. We rested in fair comfort that night; and early the next day set our horses' heads for Breault. The morning was bright and the air sharply biting. The familiar countryside, in its brown winter garb, brought a glow to my heart as I set eyes on it for the first time in four years; and a lump came in my throat when I saw the rough old tower of Breault itself, commanding from its high hill the whole country around. That tower had been home to wandering, fighting Breaults for five hundred years.

As we rode along, I remarked to Martin that Monsieur de Gourges seemed an able man.

"He is no common man," Martin replied. "I have known him these twenty years and we have fought together many times — first at Ceresole in forty-four, when he was a lad of fifteen or sixteen; and again at Siena in fifty-seven, when he was taken with the Admiral. Dominic served two years in the Spanish galleys, and since then I had not seen him until yesterday. He is a bold and resolute man, aye, and a skillful — a good man to have with you in any adventure."

"I noticed that you made no attempt to interest him by playing upon him with words," I laughed.

Martin chuckled. "You improve, Cockerel! I had an idea, Blaise, and very little more; but when I saw De Gourges the idea became a plan. 'Tis a poor plan

as yet, 'tis true; but we shall see — we shall see."

"But what is the plan, Martin?"

"Determine that as you penetrated my design to gain over Dominic de Gourges, Blaise. 'Twill make a capital exercise for the brain," he said, in a bantering tone. And no more would he tell me; but put me off by remarking that I should hear all in good time, some seven days later.

We clattered across the old drawbridge over the moat, long dry, into the courtyard of Breault, where we were greeted joyfully by old Bartelmy, my father's servant, who had acted as caretaker during my absence. Nothing of importance had transpired since my departure, except that Maître Roland, an avocat at Pau, who had been my father's man of business, — my grandfather's too, for that matter, — had sent twice last week to ask my whereabouts — a question for which Bartelmy had no answer. The second time the messenger had left word that a letter of some importance awaited me at the avocat's, and that when Bartelmy had word of me he should so inform me. Bertrand, my father's Norman horse, had died a year agone; but the Spanish mare was still alive and had two fine colts, one three years of age, just broken by Louis, the farmer's son, which no doubt I would want for myself, since he was such a beautiful animal. So Bartelmy poured out his simple heart to me; and I had no mind to stop him in this accounting of his stewardship.

Martin and I spent the afternoon in the armory and the stables. In the former were the arms of

Breaults for five centuries: the ponderous two-handed sword with which the first one had hewed out a competence for himself; the mail-coat of another who was at the taking of the Holy City; the lance of one who served under Louis the Saint; armor-of-proof worn by a De Breault who fell before the English bowmen at Poictiers; the cunningly wrought Saracen axe of still another who was Du Guesclin's comrade; and a hundred other weapons that had done duty for France. The room was crowded with trophies of the chase: boars' heads and antlered deer looked down upon us from the walls, even the floor was carpeted with the skins of bears from the mountains to the south. Martin was so much interested that I had difficulty in dragging him to the stable to look at the new colt, which I took for my own as soon as I set eyes upon him. The beast had the strength of his Norman sire and the beautiful conformation of his Andalusian mother.

The next morning I set out for Pau to call upon Maître Roland and receive the letter, although I could not guess who might have written it.

XXV

A LETTER FROM THE DEAD

As I rode toward Pau, my mind was chiefly occupied with wondering as to the author of the unexpected letter; but I was forced to dismiss each of my conjectures as impossible, one after another, and in the end was as much at a loss as when I began.

Maître Roland had grown old in the service of the noble families of the neighborhood. He had amassed a small fortune — had, in fact, become a man of some substance in Pau. I was received at the door by a lackey in neat livery, and conducted through a small room where a clerk sat at a large table, to a smaller room in the rear where the avocat was engaged in poring over some papers. He was a wizened little man, soberly dressed and almost entirely bald — a fact which he partly concealed by wearing a skullcap of black velvet. He gave me good-morning with just the proper mixture of respect for my station and realization of his own worth.

I mentioned the letter.

"Ah, yes, the letter," he said, with a touch of reproach in his voice. "I had expected you before, for I reckon this to be a communication of some importance, although I know nothing of its contents."

I explained to him the reason for my long absence. He bowed, but made no comment; and I gathered

from his manner that he thought I should have flown in some miraculous way across the whole world to expedite his business. It was most amusing. Still wearing his air of gentle censure, he selected a key from a number which lay on the table, and opened one of the two large strong-boxes which occupied a corner of the apartment. Out of the box he took a bundle of papers, from which he extracted a single, rather bulky, letter. He handed this to me with a bow. I saw with a start of astonishment that it was addressed to me in my father's labored hand: "To my son, Blaise de Breault, when he shall have reached his twenty-fifth birthday."

My first impulse was to break the seal and read the contents then and there; but a cooler second thought convinced me that it would be a better plan to wait until later. So I thanked Maître Roland for his diligence in the conduct of my affairs, and was about to take my leave, when he informed me that my few tenants had continued to pay to him their rents during my absence, and that there was a small balance due me after the expenses and charges were taken out. I thanked him once again and asked him to keep the money in his care until I should need it, for I still had a considerable portion of my share of the treasure of the Doña Maria.

When I had ridden two leagues of my homeward way I stopped, tied my horse to a convenient tree, and sat down by the roadside to read my father's letter. The day was clear and bright, and the warmth of the sun on my back was pleasant, as I sat there listening

— so it seemed to me — to the voice of one well loved.

The communication was dated four days before my father's death, and I remembered that about that time he had made a journey to Pau. Upon his return he had taken to his bed, never to arise from it again. My eyes filled with tears at the thought of him.

The letter ran thus: —

"My beloved son:

"It is in the belief that death is close upon me that I write these words. There is a certain matter of importance that I must set before you, which for reasons I believe good I have withheld until now. But all things in their order. 'Tis best, I think, to make everything clear to you by starting at the beginning, therefore I must first relate the history of how the Bennoni treasure came into my possession."

You may believe that I started with astonishment when I read these words. I saw for an instant the forest glade and fat Michel's cruel face; I felt the iron embrace of the cord around my temples. Then I hurried on through the letter with ever growing amazement.

" 'Twas but a short time before the fall of Siena, while returning from an expedition to the southward, that we fell upon and took by escalade a walled town, the seat of the Bennoni family. The Spanish had occupied it with a small force, inadequate to defend it properly, but the fighting was hot for more than three

hours, until we made a place for ourselves on the walls. Then in an hour's time we swept the town clean of Spaniards. My company was assigned to guard-duty for the night, and after placing them upon their stations, I rode past the castle, which was very old and had fallen into decay, and came upon the house occupied at that time by the Bennoni family. It lay back some distance from the street, with a grove of dark and drooping trees at one side; and the blood-red reflection of the setting sun from its windows gave it a singularly lonesome and fearsome appearance. As I came to the gateway, I stopped to admire the beautiful carvings upon the stone arch — for none excel the men of Italy in craftsmanship of this kind.

"While so engaged, I heard within the house a woman's voice raised in a shriek of terror. I dismounted and ran up the footway of stone flags to the door, which swung half-open, giving entrance to a large hall paneled in dark wood, lighted dimly by high windows. Stretched upon the floor near the door lay a slender man of middle-age, with delicate features which had already begun to stiffen in death, while under a massive table near by was huddled a common fellow in tattered clothes, dead, with a gold-hilted poniard — the same I now carry — buried in his breast. A broad staircase ran upward from the hall to the floor above, and at its foot a handsome youth of some sixteen years, with a naked sword clenched in his hand, lay dying of a gaping wound in his side. Above I could hear sounds of struggle and a hoarse voice raised in anger. As I started to mount the stairs,

I heard once again that woman's voice in a scream of mortal fear. At the top of the stairway was a long corridor, from which many doors gave access to rooms on either side. One of these stood open; a bright gleam of light fell from it across the dark floor; and toward it I ran at my best speed.

"When I entered the apartment, I saw a woman of some thirty-five years in the grasp of two men who were attempting to wrest from her a leathern bag. Before I could even shout one of her captors, a tall, thin, gangling fellow of villainous countenance, wearied, no doubt, of the struggle, drew his dagger and thrust it without warning deep into her body. She slipped to the floor without another sound. The other man, a huge rascal, of a great fatness, who wore a black patch over his eye, drew back and looked at his companion with contempt. Ere he could speak, I cried out.

"At the sound, they took right handily to their swords, as one man, and met me halfway. The fat one moved with a curious lightness for one of his size; but I had no great trouble in disposing of them. At the first pass I ran the tall man through the arm, so that he dropped his weapon and ran from the room, and after three passes I disarmed his companion, although he had some skill at fence. When I drew back to give him the coup de grâce, he turned and ran through the door after the other. I did not pursue, but went to see what could be done for the wounded lady, but there was nothing to do — she was almost sped and could not speak. At the last she thrust into

my hands the leathern bag, gazed at me with solemn appeal in her beautiful eyes, and so died. That she was the mistress of the house I did not doubt, for she was of great beauty and richly dressed, though her clothes were torn from her lovely arms and shoulders. I put the bag she had given me in my doublet, composed her decently on the carved wooden bed in one corner of the room, and took my way to headquarters.

"That night, in the privacy of my quarters, I poured the contents of the bag upon my table. To my surprise, there came from it a large number of jewels of all descriptions: rubies, diamonds, emeralds, and many lesser gems, of all sizes and set in divers ways. I judged them to be of great value. As to that, you can form your own opinion, for they remain now just as they were. Through that night I considered what to do with this fabulous wealth which had come unbidden into my hands; for while a common man might profit from such an affair, the Breaults have always taken their gains in fair fight; and this had come to me secondhand; belonged, manifestly, to the kin of the dead people in the house at the foot of the castle wall. A nice point of honor, you may say? But it is in the way he decides such points that the honest man is distinguished from the rogue.

"The next morning I took a file of men and buried the dead Bennonis in the shade of the gloomy grove beside their house. Afterward I made inquiry as to the next of kin of these people; but I learned nothing, for the inhabitants of the town were sullen and would not speak — if, indeed, they knew anything, which I

doubt. And though I combed the town, I could not lay hands upon the murderers. They had disappeared as completely as though the earth had swallowed them up. However, I have reason to believe that they are very much alive so late as this last night, before my present writing.

"For several years, during the Italian campaigns, I pursued my inquiries regarding the heirs of the Bennoni family, but without success. After my return to France I pursued the quest by letter, with indifferent results until recently, when I received a communication, most bravely written with many flourishes, from a clerk who had been at one time the boy's preceptor in learning. He set out for me a complete history of the family, and concluded by saying that they had been entirely exterminated in the wars of the last forty years. So, for the last month, I have felt that this treasure was as much mine as anybody's; and I have thought much about the best possible use for it.

"Twice since it came into my possession I have been the object of treacherous attacks: once while hunting in the train of Admiral de Coligny, when a bolt from a crossbow, coming from behind, missed so narrowly as to slit my doublet; and again when I was set upon by footpads in the streets of Paris, escaping only by the quickness of my eye and the strength of my wrist. I had the misfortune to kill both of those villains, so there was no information to be gained as to their employers. Yesterday I spent much time around the Great Stone of Breault, which, as you know, is said to be the altar stone of some ancient faith, and to-day

I find that the ground around it has been disturbed, dug up over a large space. I could discern the footprints of two men, one evidently of great weight. It would seem that my two bullies have not given up their search.

"And now, my dear son, I must tell you the conclusions to which my reflections have led. I have often observed that unlimited riches in youth lead to a dissolute and lazy manhood, which gains neither honor, glory, nor further possessions; yet the child of poverty, whose sword is his only fortune, provided he be of good blood, may wring from a hard world all that it holds of fame, riches, and advancement. As you know, I have devoted these last three years to your education; and have made of you, I believe, a modest and capable youth. You have a strong body, a good deportment, and a very pretty trick of swordplay; so I have decided to keep from you the knowledge of your good fortune, and let you sharpen your talents against the rough side of the world until you have reached the age of five-and-twenty, when you will have gained the experience to administer wisely the fortune which the good God has bestowed upon you.

"Some time since I did recommend that you seek out Martin Belcastel, my old comrade, and learn from him all you can, for he is a true brave and a gallant gentleman. If you have not done this when you receive my letter, let me advise you once more to make him your friend. Look for him where there is need of cool and skillful men. Share with him everything you have, to the very end.

"One more command I must lay upon you, mon cher Blaise, ere I bid you adieu. Should any of the sons of le Comte Marcel de Flahault (not Étienne, his cousin) desire to fight you, accommodate him for my sake. We had a difference of opinion and had arranged to fight, when he was stricken with a violent fever and died before the day of the meeting. You can plainly see that we owe them an opportunity to cleanse their honor.

"We Breaults have from the beginning collected more scars, blows, hard knocks, and renown than we have goods, and our estates have dwindled with each generation. I have hopes that you will use the Bennoni jewels to bring back to Breault its former prosperity. But that is for you to judge.

"The treasure of the Bennonis you will find in the helmet of Jean de Breault, which hangs above the armory door."

I remembered now my father's strange gestures on the night when I had found him at the armory door, a few days before his death. What a dolt I was not to have guessed that there was more there than met the eye! I read the few remaining lines.

"This has been a grievous labor to a hand more used to the sword than to the pen, and I have been overlong at it, I fear; so I bid you farewell. I have but one regret in dying and that is parting with my well-loved son.

"Your father,

"Gervaise de Breault."

Reading these amazing words, I was overcome with grief for this kind father, who had planned so wisely for me even in the throes of death. I thought of those three years of happiness which had lasted from the time of my father's return from the wars until the end. Then, after sad reflection, the problems of the present flashed back into my mind. I folded the letter and thrust it into my doublet, flung myself upon my horse and rode at top speed to Breault.

Martin was in the armory, pacing to and fro in deep thought, when I burst in upon him, big with my astounding news. I handed him my father's letter. He read tranquilly until he came to that part where he was mentioned, and then I thought I saw a suspicious glitter in his eye.

" 'Twas like him," he exclaimed huskily.

I took down the old helmet of Jean de Breault, and inside it my hand closed on something soft. I drew it out and there, sure enough, was a bag of leather. While I opened it Martin barred the armory door. Upside down over a table, there rolled from it such a flashing, glittering, glowing mass of jewels as fairly dazzled my poor eyes, unaccustomed to such sights. Even Martin was shaken from his usual calm.

"You are rich, Blaise," he cried delightedly.

"Nay, we are rich," I answered. But Martin smiled and shook his head.

XXVI

WE PREPARE TO SETTLE A SCORE

During the next following days Martin and I examined the Bennoni jewels a score of times, making many guesses as to their value, but such was our ignorance of these matters that our conjectures did, in truth, fall far short of their actual worth. My father was often in my thoughts as I moved about Breault, sometimes in Martin's company, sometimes alone, planning the changes I would make at no very distant day; picking the farms that lay on the edge of my little domain and which I would fain add to it; calculating at great pains the cost of the building I would do in order to restore my estate to its ancient rank in Gascony.

"Mordieu! Now that I am rich," I said to Martin, one night as we sat in the armory, "I believe I shall have no trouble in convincing le Comte de la Costa of my fitness for an alliance with his family.

"Doubtless 'twill help," Martin assented, "together with your ancient and honorable lineage, your good courage and knightly spirit — all of which I shall call to the attention of Monsieur le Comte at the proper time."

These words of Martin's confused me; and in order to cover up my embarrassment I exclaimed, "But at Bordeaux it was riches we spoke of — "

"A man's true riches lie in his heart," Martin replied. "Consider your father, boy! In all his life he scarce had two pistoles to rub together in his purse; yet he was valiant, courteous, kindly, resolute in spirit — a gentleman, in short. Aye, Gervaise was truly rich!" He sighed, and fell into a reverie which lasted until we sought our beds.

The next morning I suggested to him that we start for Paris, where we could sell the jewels and arrive at an exact knowledge of the extent of our wealth.

"And present our suit to Monsieur le Comte, marry the lady out of hand, and be happy ever after — eh, Blaise?" He smiled at me affectionately. "Nay, my dear boy! Have you forgotten that we have appointed a meeting with Monsieur de Gourges for to-morrow?"

On the following day, at mid-afternoon, came a-riding that same Dominic de Gourges, careless and debonair, on a white horse with handsome trappings of green picked out with gold. "Holà, mes amis!" he called in a loud, cheerful voice, as he crossed the bridge over the fosse. "I am here, you see, as I promised."

At table, when his tongue was somewhat loosed with wine, Monsieur de Gourges began without preface to tell us a plan he had conceived.

"I have consulted with friends and neighbors in the vicinity of my estate, men of all degrees, and they, as well as myself, are of the opinion that this outrage is not to be endured. Those bloody dogs of Spain have overreached themselves at last. I have ordered

that my estates be sold, and I shall use the moneys I receive to equip three vessels — 'twill be enough, I think — with soldiers and ordnance. With three sound ships, if my plan carries well, I can work great havoc among the murderers. What think you of such a scheme, mes amis?"

" 'Tis good!" I cried with enthusiasm. "Count on me, monsieur! But I must have the honor of paying my share of the charges."

"And so you shall if that is your desire," said Dominic de Gourges.

"I had thought of interesting someone in such a scheme," said Martin, "but it must be conducted secretly and without haste, under the guise of some more peaceful purpose. If it came to the ears of the nobles about the Queen Mother, we should be prevented from sailing."

"Then," said De Gourges hotly, "we should sail despite them."

"Nay, we must be reasonable, mon cher Dominic," said Martin, smiling at his heat. "As you know, they could easily overwhelm us. 'Tis necessary, then, to outwit them. Let us consider the actual possibilities of the situation."

"I had thought of three hundred soldiers," remarked De Gourges.

"Too large a force for any ordinary expedition," Martin objected promptly.

"And besides," I told him, "I promise to furnish you with five hundred warriors within three days after I am set ashore at a point I shall show you."

"Now that is a noble idea," said Martin heartily. "Satouriona, eh? Yes, Dominic, I think Blaise can make good his promise, for he stands high in the graces of that barbarian king, and they will be brave fighters, skilled in the savage warfare of the jungle. Am I not right, Blaise?"

"There are no braver men on earth than the Criques, although they know nothing of our style of fighting, and must be allowed to conduct their part of the battle, if there be one, in their own way."

"We could give it out that we were going on a slave-taking venture," said Martin. "A story of that kind would account for many things — a hundred and fifty soldiers, numerous culverins and stands of arms."

At breakfast we discussed the matter again. Dominic de Gourges left Breault afire with enthusiasm and hoping to see our plans bear fruit within three months. But that was not to be; it was almost a year and a half before we did take ship at Bordeaux and sail away on the first stage of our anticipated voyage. The course of events led like this: At sunrise, the day after De Gourges' departure, we turned our horses' heads toward Paris. I carried the Bennoni jewels, still in the leathern bag, under my doublet. We spent two days at Belcastel, which proved to be a small but beautiful estate; the house, built in the time of Martin's father, of no great size, but comfortable; the farms, fertile and productive. Belcastel yielded each year — Martin explained — a revenue which was sufficient for the master's modest needs, so he was content to leave the dull business of

conducting the affairs of the estate to his steward, who had done it excellently for many years. After two days in its calm routine I became impatient, and Martin no less so, for I carried the price of a king's ransom in my breast, and we were desirous of putting it in a safe place. So we set out anew for Paris, and arrived in due course of time at our destination.

My first act was to send Nicolas to ascertain when I might present myself to Monsieur le Comte de la Costa, and pay my respects to Marie. He came back with the disquieting report that the uncle and the niece were paying a visit of some length at the Count's estate in the South, and were not expected to return to Paris for a considerable time. At that I cursed Monsieur le Comte most bitterly, for I saw in this journey nothing but a plot to separate me from my heart's dearest. And when Martin laughed at my impatience, I fell into a sullen fit, which only amused him the more.

When I had slept on it I came to a more cheerful humor, and went with Martin to a certain goldsmith, Faure by name, who could be trusted to deal honestly by us. He was a tall man, with a peering expression of the eye, who met us at the door and led us to a small room, shut off from a larger one filled with industrious artisans and apprentices, all busy at long benches. Upon learning the nature of our business with him, he closed the door with discreet care and required to see the jewels. He considered the contents of the bag for a long time, turning the pieces over and over in his slender fingers, examining

them carefully through an odd sort of glass which he held, by dint of much squinting, in one eye.

"Messieurs," he said at last, "you have here a treasure that will net you a considerable fortune. To put an exact value on these gems is a task of some magnitude — 'twill take a week's time to do it. I will undertake it, however, and report to you my valuation; then, if it seems satisfactory to you, I will dispose of the jewels at the price I name."

We agreed to this and took our leave; but before we left I reserved from the treasure one huge ruby, with a clear glowing fire at its heart, as a present for my fiancée, and forced upon Martin an emerald of fair size and without blemish, set in a ring carved cunningly to the semblance of a dragon, the emerald bound strongly upon its head with claws of gold. He accepted it with reluctance, although it was evident that he admired it.

For some weeks I had to content myself in Paris without a sight of my liege lady or any word from her. I made many excursions about the city; and became each day more familiar with its streets and lanes. It attracted me, and yet repelled me. Under the smooth surface of gaiety were to be felt or guessed a thousand cross-currents of plot and scheme. But I was careful to keep my tongue between my teeth, to engage in no argument and to carry my sword in its sheath. I spent much time in the society of Martin Belcastel and made some of his friends mine; and I waited as patiently as I could for the return of the absent.

At last they came. I desired that Martin arrange

at once to present me to Monsieur le Comte; and that he act as my father in pressing my suit for his fair niece's hand in marriage. So Nicolas went again to the house and brought reply that Monsieur le Comte would be pleased to receive us the second day thereafter. Again I had to wait, fuming and sullen by turns; but all things have an end, even discouragement, and finally the hour arrived. We presented ourselves at the door. A lackey ushered us into his presence. At first glance, the uncle seemed almost an exact counterpart of the Sieur de la Costa who perished in the wilderness over-seas, but on closer acquaintance he proved to be close of speech where the other was free; gruff of manner, where the other had been courteous and affable. We talked for some time of indifferent matters, while Monsieur le Comte cast at me many sharp and penetrating looks; and then Martin and he retired to a window in an alcove, where they conversed at length, leaving me to my own devices. When once more they faced me, I could read nothing in their faces; for Martin's wore its usual gravity and the Count's own expression was inscrutable. He thanked me most punctiliously for the part I had played in saving the life of his niece, and was so far indulgent as to send for her to attend upon us, when I made inquiry after her health.

As she entered the room, she walked in such lightness and beauty that her little feet seemed hardly to touch the floor; and there shone on her gentle face an expression of such happiness as more than repaid me for the long weeks of loneliness and doubting. We

had, perforce, to conduct ourselves with the utmost dignity before these witnesses, — it was discreet "Mademoiselle" and "Monsieur" between us, — but her eyes told me all I wished to know; and when I lifted her hand to my lips, I felt a reassuring pressure from her soft fingers. We talked stiffly for a time of things about which we cared nothing; and then, all too quickly for me, Martin and I must needs make our salutations.

"Monsieur le Comte de la Costa does not oppose the match," Martin told me, when we were again in our own quarters, "but he prefers that you wait until you have come safely home from the expedition we contemplate. Then, if you both be of the same mind, he will give his consent and arrange to turn over to Marie the inheritance from her father, which he now has in his charge. His niece has accepted this arrangement — much against her will, he confessed. 'Tis a bitter pill to swallow, I know, Blaise; but Monsieur le Comte has the whip hand — "

" 'Tis but a flimsy excuse!" I broke in. "He does not like me — "

"Nay, Blaise, it is not so much that he dislikes you, I think; but there is another he likes better."

My hand reached by instinct for the sword at my side; and Martin saw it.

"Nay, my son, that would never do," he said.

And so I, like my dear love, had to accept the situation whether I would or no.

A few days later Monsieur Faure placed in my hands the last of the moneys received from the sale of

the Bennoni jewels. The total sum would have meant comfort for a French noble of high rank — for a poor Gascon it was a tremendous fortune. Twice during the year that followed I made the journey to Breault, where carpenters and masons were busy making the additions I had planned, under the direction of Martin's clever steward, whom he had loaned me for that purpose. Upon two other occasions I was absent from Paris on business concerning our expedition. Five times Dominic de Gourges came to Paris to consult with Martin and me. The selling of his own estates dragged, and the moneys he finally received from them were much smaller than he expected; so Belcastel, and I, and others of his friends, contributed what was necessary to buy and equip the vessels for our expedition.

During all those months I never saw Marie alone; there was always someone present at our meetings — Madame la Comtesse, her grandmother, Matilde, her maid, a sour spinster, sometimes Monsieur le Comte himself. Turn, twist, and contrive as I would, I failed to defeat their watchfulness. A chance touch, a concealed glance of love were all our pleasures. At last, late in the year 1567, came the long-expected message from Dominic de Gourges at Bordeaux that we should sail in a fortnight. This I communicated to my lady at our next meeting; but she said little, although her dear eyes clouded with fear. Monsieur le Comte seemed interested and asked me a number of questions; but, although he was of our faith, I told him nothing of the real object of the venture. I

determined, then, to see Marie alone ere I left Paris.

Two nights later, as I supped at the Sword of the Brave Chevalier, came Nicolas to me with a note, which had been handed in at the door. It contained but a single line: "Walk in the garden to-night at nine. M."

I was overjoyed, and rewarded Nicolas with a gold-piece. At nine o'clock I had Marie in my arms; and there burst from my lips all those words of love pent within my unwilling breast for so many months.

"But why must you leave me, Blaise? Why go back to that savage land which is already red with the blood of our people? I shall fear for you. Do you love glory more than me?"

"Nay, sweetheart! You know I love you best. But you know also that my honor is engaged and I must go."

"Yes, you must go. I will wait for you," she said bravely. "Come back to me as valiant and honorable as when you went. I pray for your good fortune."

A fortnight later we sailed from Bordeaux on our errand of vengeance.

XXVII

SATOURIONA

Our navigation successful, on the eighth day of April we cast anchor in a small haven some five leagues north of the mouth of the Rivière de Mai; and the next morning, proceeding with caution some three leagues to the southward, we came upon a narrow creek. Here Martin and I decided to strike inland as far as possible by boat, and then proceed overland to the Crique village where we had spent so many months. Once there, I felt certain we could enlist Satouriona and his warriors in our cause. We were agreed that the stroke against Fort Carolin — it had been renamed Fort San Mateo — must be swift and sure, else the Spaniards might succeed in bringing up reënforcements from Fort Saint Augustine. Dominic de Gourges proposed to lie hidden in the inlet until he had word from us.

We started two hours before noon with a crew of lusty oarsmen, and proceeded for some time up the stream until we reached a place where we could land. The herons feeding in the marshes, the dark stream with its floating, armored reptiles, the dank smell of the gloomy and matted jungle on either side — all these brought back vividly to my mind those terrible days following the massacre at the fort. It seemed to me that I had never left this most fateful land:

the quiet months in France faded, dreamlike, without substance.

Soon we were treading the obscure paths of the forest, bearing ever to the southwest among the dusky aisles of the trees, ghostly in their silver mantles of drooping moss. The first shades of night brooded over the land when we came at last, without mishap, to the red men's village.

Here all was changed. Gone were the usual cheerful sounds of evening, the chatter of women about the cooking-fires, the laughter and shouts of children, the buzz of conversation among the men. Instead, a sombre hush hung over the town, as about a place of death. No fires gleamed their welcome; we saw but two or three indistinct figures. Scarce had we halted before the lodge of Satouriona when there broke out from within the weird wailing of women's voices — a wordless chant which rose, fell, and rose again in a hundred inflections of anguish.

"The death song!" Martin exclaimed. "Heaven grant it be not for Satouriona!"

The song of grief swelled, diminished, sank to the low, murmurous complaint of souls exhausted by sorrow. It tore at my heart.

For a long time we stood there listening; then Martin thrust aside the curtain of skins which hung in the doorway and we stepped within. Before us sat Satouriona, cross-legged upon the floor, beside a dying fire, muffled in a splendid robe of black feathers. In the murky radiance of the fire only his restless eyes were visible. At the back of the room several squaws

chanted, swaying with bowed heads and folded arms, about a bed of buckskins upon which lay a form swathed in the numberless wrappings of death.

At our entrance the Crique chieftain rose to his full height in one movement and threw aside his mantle. I saw that his face was painted with the black of those who mourn; his eyes were bright with anger. He took a step toward us ere recognition dawned in his eyes.

"O Nutcha! O Chonga!" he said in the deep gutturals of the Crique language, "you are pleasant to the eyes of Satouriona, though his heart is black with sorrow. The son of my lodge has left us; his spirit has fled to the skies; he hunts among the blessed. Gone is the strong young warrior from the warpath; gone the light-footed hunter from the forest; gone the young chief from the council." He bowed his stately head upon his broad breast.

"How came the young warrior to his death, O Chief of the Criques?" I asked.

"By the hand of a white man! As he fished upon the river, there crept upon him a paleface who let out his spirit through his breast with the Stick that Thunders. But they shall be punished." He drew himself up proudly. "To-morrow Satouriona takes the warpath."

"O Satouriona, our hearts sorrow with yours for the empty place in your lodge, for the young man gone before his time to the brotherhood of the dead," said Martin, after the manner of the tribesmen. "These be evil white men, dealers of death who speak

with forked tongues. It is with me even as with you, for the hands of those men are red with the blood of mine own brothers. Shall we take the path of war together?"

"It shall be as you say," said the chief. "The blood of my son calls aloud for vengeance, and the souls of his slayers shall follow him to the feet of the Great Spirit. Rest, my brothers, in the lodge of Satouriona to-night. With the dawning of a new day we will take counsel, one with the other."

So we lay the night in the lodge; but there was no sleep. What with the presence of the dead, the close air and the crooning song of the mourners, which was renewed at frequent intervals, the night was strange and long. But morning came at length, and we consulted with the chief as to the disposition of his force and ours. It was finally decided that the Crique braves should surround the fort on three sides, — north, south, and west, — and leave to us the task of opening the attack from the east. Their two small batteries were of small consequence — so we decided, after hearing Satouriona's description of them, being scarcely more than trenches built of logs and earth, with two culverins each, and a garrison of some fifteen men. They lay close to the mouth of the river, one on each side. The attack should be made at dawn.

At sunset the body of the young chief was laid with those of his fathers, on a high platform, in a secret place in the forest, with his favorite weapons of war and the hunt beside him. After the simple ceremony we returned with the chieftain to the village. Twilight

had fallen when we arrived; cooking-fires blazed before the huts, and great flames leaped and crackled before the council-house. Haunches of venison, birds, and fish were roasting. After we had feasted, Satouriona took his seat before the door of the council-house, with the sub-chiefs and old men ranged on either side of him, while the younger warriors, some five hundred strong, stood facing their chief across the fire. All about, in a large circle, were the women, striplings, and children, Martin and I retiring to the darkness beyond the circle of firelight. There we came upon the Deer, who greeted us with the peculiar composure of his race, apparently no more surprised to see us than if we had been absent only a day.

The fire, replenished constantly with new fuel by the squaws, cast a brilliant light upon the gaudy trappings of the braves, upon their impassive faces, painted in striking reds and yellows to terrorize their enemies, as they stood there motionless and silent. Then from behind the mass of men came the first beats of a drum; then another; and another; and others, one by one, until their sound made a continuous thunder that beat upon the ear in ever-recurring waves. Suddenly a young warrior, with his face and chest painted horribly in circles of white, red, yellow, leaped into the open space around the fire. He was naked to the waist and held a knife in one hand, a hatchet in the other. Crouching low, he began with curiously stealthy steps to move about the fire, uttering as he did so numerous subdued yelps, as a hound does upon a warm scent. The drums throbbed on without ceas-

ing, and a second warrior joined the first. Others followed, accompanied by the weird, insistent *tom-tom-tom* of the drums, until the whole space was filled with stooping, sinister figures, swaying in unison to the throbbing roar that filled their ears. The watchers swayed in sympathy; and at intervals women threaded their way among the dancers with wood to feed the fire. So the tribesmen tracked their enemy and marked him down. And then, after a time there arose above all other sounds the long, quavering, blood-chilling cry of a brave who has seen his foe — the horrible war-whoop!

Instantly the night became hideous, as each of the savages added his voice to the clamor. They moved faster and faster, leaping high in air, brandishing their weapons above their feathered heads, until, to my fascinated eyes, they seemed like demons, their faces distorted with madness, their eyes gleaming redder than the fire, their twitching lips white with foam. And above all, stronger than all, rose the unceasing, compelling throb of the booming drums. Mordieu! Mes amis — it was an appalling scene!

And it went on hour after hour through the night while Martin and I watched, half dazed with the evil enchantment of the drums' deep voices. The Deer had long since joined the dance. Satouriona, alone of all his people, showed no emotion, but gazed with impassive eyes at the scene before him. When a dancer fell exhausted he was dragged by the women from beneath the thudding feet of his fellows and refreshed with food and water; rested, he returned once

more to the writhing, twisting mazes of the dance, lost himself again in the throng of leaping, bounding black figures in the firelight.

The eastern sky was gray with impending day when the last brave staggered, spun on his heel, and fell senseless upon the hard-trampled earth. The dance of war was over. I felt a great drowsiness upon me. Satouriona arose and beckoned us to him.

"Eat and sleep, my brothers, ere you return to your people," he advised us. "A dull eye and a wandering foot are ill things on the trail."

This was good counsel and we followed it, eating voraciously and sleeping for some hours before we began the return journey to the ships. This journey we completed at nightfall; we described our plan to Monsieur de Gourges and he approved of it most emphatically.

"Sacré nom de Dieu!" he cried. "I believe we shall lay these whelps by the heels most handily. With these savages hidden in the woods about the fort to cut off the refugees, there will not be a survivor."

"I do not intend there shall be one," Martin assured him grimly.

XXVIII

MARTIN IS RELEASED FROM HIS VOW

I was awakened some hours before dawn the following morning by the rattle of yards, the flapping of sails, and the roaring voice of Dominic de Gourges as the ship got under way. Farther off I heard sounds of activity on the other vessels of our fleet. Martin was up and gone from the cabin we shared together; so I sprang up hastily, armed myself, and went on deck, a little vexed that he should leave me sleeping like a boy when events were on the move. Upon reaching the deck I found that I was the last of the whole ship's company to awaken, the soldiers being already under arms and the sailors moving briskly about their duties. There was a subdued air of excitement among them. I joined Martin and the captain where they stood on the foredeck.

"I had thought," said the captain, "of anchoring at the river's mouth and sending landing parties to both shores to subdue the two small batteries which are located there. Sixty men — "

"Nay, why not drop anchor in the river between them and drive them out with your culverins?" I asked bluntly.

"Nom d'un — Mille tonnerres! The young one has hit upon a proper scheme — eh, mon cher Martin? And where old war-dogs have failed."

" 'Twill most likely succeed," was Martin's comment. I could feel his eyes upon me.

"Of a certainty," said Monsieur de Gourges. " 'Tis audacious — that's why 'twill prosper." He hurried away, leaving me well pleased with myself.

Then I heard Martin chuckle.

"You may laugh," I exclaimed angrily, "but 'tis none so bad a plan — "

"Do not ruffle your feathers, Blaise," Martin broke in upon my hot words, laying a soothing hand upon my shoulder. " 'Twas not at you I laughed, but at myself and Dominic, grown old in war and taking no account of the ordnance. You young men will learn the rightful use of muskets, culverins, and petards. And then there is this new weapon, — an armorer did show me one in Paris last year, — a pistolet, 'tis called, a small musket to be held in the hand, and it fires like one, having a spring which turns a small wheel on the lock and throws a spark upon the powder. A good thing in a mêlée!"

"These weapons grow more in use each year," I said thoughtfully. "In the future, no doubt, they may be used as much as pikes, halberds, or crossbows."

Martin sighed.

"Well, at least no weapon will ever supplant the sword in my time," he remarked; and then he became cheerful once more.

Daylight found us a league off the mouth of the Rivière de Mai, with the balance of our fleet close by, and a light but steady breeze blowing from the east. Monsieur de Gourges had signals run up at the mast-

head, ordering our consorts to follow us. We stood straight in for the mouth of the river. Some distance back from the sea we could make out the low walls of the redoubts on either side of the slow stream, with the shining mouths of culverins staring blankly at us, but of the garrisons we could discern nothing. Soon we entered the river and every man stood to his arms. Culverins were loaded and pointed; men stood beside them with lighted matches; musketeers with primed and loaded pieces lined the bulwarks on each side of the vessel. Behind us our sister-ships were coming up rapidly. When we had reached a point exactly between the two small forts, sail was taken in and the anchor dropped. Then, at a word from Dominic de Gourges, the air was rent with the thunderous roar of our ordnance, and a rolling cloud of smoke obscured for a moment both shores of the river, before it was soon dispersed by the wind. For the first time we saw the defenders of the redoubts; but there was no reply from their cannon. Instead, a white flag appeared above the rampart on the north bank, while on the south the Spaniards, eleven in number, climbed hastily over the wall and disappeared in the forest. A boat was despatched to the north shore, and returned with eight prisoners, bound with cords. Six others, — the landing party reported, — had been killed by our fire, and the walls were badly battered. Monsieur de Gourges glowed with satisfaction; and, the other ships coming up meanwhile, he ordered the anchor raised and sail made again. So we continued our progress upstream.

At my suggestion we landed at a point a short distance from the fort, where our movements could not be observed — in fact, at that same place where Martin and I had once witnessed the arrival of the ships of Pedro Menendez. In a long file we followed the path through the jungle, and had almost reached the clearing that surrounded Fort San Mateo when a bronzed and warlike figure, naked to the waist, painted most fearsomely, with his legs arrayed in the usual wrappings of a Crique warrior, stepped into the path and halted us. It was the Deer, who had come to tell us that all was well. Satouriona's warriors had drawn a cordon about the fort on three sides. They were posted on the north shore of the river, across from the Spanish stronghold, well hidden among the sheltering trees, and also on the west and south, but at some distance, because the cleared land around the fort afforded no cover.

"'Tis good!" exclaimed De Gourges vigorously, when he had listened to my interpretation of the words of our red ally. "And now, let us to work! Remember, men, not one of these murderers is to escape. The prisoners we will hang as they hung Frenchmen, our brethren and countrymen! We must teach these Spanish hounds a lesson they will not soon forget."

With these words, he passed through the fringe of brushwood that concealed us from the eyes of the enemy, and moved on toward the log walls of San Mateo. I followed him, and Martin Belcastel joined us. Dominic de Gourges said nothing for some time, as he studied the situation. To me, Fort Carolin —

so I still thought of it — was greatly altered. The walls had been heightened and completed; bastions, from which the black muzzles of culverins threatened, had been added; the whole fortification had been strengthened in all ways. At sight of us a sentry cried out in sharp challenge from the wall; and other figures joined him, pointing and gesturing. At our backs the soldiers had formed ranks and stood waiting. On the river our three ships had taken up a position opposite the fort, where the fire from their cannon would be most effective. We seemed in good case.

The captain broke silence. " 'Tis none so bad, mes amis. They have the advantage of the rising ground and the walls, 'tis true; but there is no ditch — for which I am thankful. With the barbarians on three sides and ourselves on the fourth, we can attack every point at once. Diable! 'tis not so hard a nut to crack! The gates are the weak place — under the sentry there! Let us try first a little surprise. Martin, do you return to the ranks and bring up three men with petards. If we can blow in the gates, we have them in the hollow of my hand." He closed his powerful hand as he spoke.

"That is an idea!" assented Martin, his spirits rising at the close prospect of a mêlée, and turned to execute the order.

He had scarce reached the edge of the clearing, when a man in half-armor issued from those gates which we had just discussed and advanced toward us. He bore a white flag in his hand.

"A parley, eh?" said the captain. "Come, mon cher Blaise, let us meet him halfway." And, suiting the action to the word, he set off at a rapid pace. I followed, so we met the Spaniard midway between fort and forest. He was but a stripling, with the first down of manhood upon his lip, but he looked at us with insolent eyes and bore himself with all the arrogant assurance of his race. He halted when we were separated by five paces. We followed his example.

"I am come to require of you," he began, "your names; and by what right you have entered into the dominions of the King of Spain with an armed force." This was spoken in a loud voice, in Spanish, which with some difficulty, I was able to follow.

"We are a company of French gentlemen, banded together for the purpose of punishing the murderers of our countrymen," replied our captain sternly. "And I hereby call upon you to surrender, if you have women and children among your people, in order to save their lives. If you have none but combatants" — he shrugged his shoulders — "I advise you to fight, monsieur l'officier, for it is determined that every Spaniard within the fort shall die, either by the sword or by the cord. It is a matter of indifference to me which method you choose."

The Spaniard's lip curled. "Let us see, then," he said sneeringly, "if you can make good your promise."

He turned abruptly on his heel and took his way, unhurried, toward the gates of San Mateo, while Dominic de Gourges and I began to retrace our steps toward the French lines.

"An irritating animal!" cried my companion. "Bah! The very sight of one of these dogs sickens me." He quickened his step, hurrying to meet Martin Belcastel, who was coming up, followed by three men with the petards.

Just then something sang in a shrill, keening whine above me, and I stared stupidly as the captain's green cap leaped from his head and fell to the ground. I heard the sharp crack of a musket, followed immediately by a roar of anger from Dominic de Gourges. He wheeled like a flash and bounded by me, bawling something of which I was not sure, but which I took to be, "Treacherous vermin!" I spun on my heel and began likewise to run toward the fort, tugging at my sword as I ran. Over the nearest bastion a few shreds of smoke still floated in the air, but of the marksman nothing was to be seen. In front of me De Gourges gained rapidly on the Spanish officer, who — after one glance over his shoulder — had abandoned his dignified gait and taken to his heels. He was too slow to escape. The Frenchman swept down upon him like a whirlwind, hurled himself through the air, and bore the luckless Spaniard to the ground. The young officer struggled, like a leveret in the jaws of a hound, but it availed him nothing, for he was like a child in the mighty hands of his captor. In a trice De Gourges was up with his captive pinioned in his arms.

"Shalt dangle on rope's end for this, faithless puppy!" he growled, glaring savagely at the prisoner.

At that moment another musket ball tore up the

ground at my feet, spattering me with sand. I glanced quickly up at the bastion where I knew the musketeer to be, and there, gazing at me over the rough logs of the wall, was Michel Barre! At sight of him all my old hatred of the wretch flared again.

"You shoot better with the crossbow, Master Barre," I called out.

Dominic de Gourges was marching toward our lines with the Spanish officer in his vise-like grip, and I half turned to join him when I saw the gates of the fort open. A party of a dozen Spaniards came out and bore down on us at a run, led by a slender, wiry man with a red silken kerchief bound about his head. It was all with such speed, they were almost upon us ere I could give the alarm.

"Swords, mon capitaine, swords!" I shouted.

The captain turned and saw the situation. Up whirled his treacherous prisoner high in air above his head, no more than a man of straw in those powerful hands, to be dashed in the next instant to the ground with terrific force. He never moved again!

But I saw that De Gourges was at the mercy of the man with the red bandeau, who had outstripped his companions by ten paces; it seemed that, before he could draw and defend himself, the Spaniard would have a sword through him. I flung myself between them. The onrushing man aimed a furious cut at me; but I stooped beneath it and ran him through the throat at the second pass.

"Well played, young Blaise! Well played! I owe you one for that!" cried the captain.

I had no time to reply, for in the wink of an eye we were hedged about with flashing steel, falling back slowly, shoulder to shoulder, before the onslaught of the enemy. Thrust, parry and thrust again! A backward step, — against my will, — clang and clash of steel on steel — a hit. I took a scratch upon the arm. Five blades glittered before my eyes at once, all swept aside in one slashing parry. Around me I heard the hot curses of our foes as they pressed upon us, hindering each other in their eagerness; on my left, the booming laugh of Dominic de Gourges as he laid about him; sweat dripped from my face. Diable! 'Twas quick work and close. We retreated stubbornly, giving nothing that they did not win at some cost to themselves. Ranting, roaring, cursing, they beat upon us like the waves of the sea. Twice we rallied sharply, stood firm with a rousing exchange, only to give way again before the sheer weight of them. The first time I came off scatheless; but during the second stand I felt the keen bite of a sword in my left arm, as I stumbled in rough ground, an attention which I repaid with interest by wounding two of my opponents. Then I heard a familiar voice on my right.

"Keep them in play! Succor — "

The rest of Martin's words were mingled with a sudden roll of our ordnance from the river and the reply of the culverins on the walls of San Mateo.

The general battle was joined and at this medley of cannonade and musket-fire, the Spaniards bethought themselves of the serious business of defence and so

retreated. We obstructed the retreat as best we could, and some threw their arms in surrender. They were bound and placed under guard, while we turned to blowing in the gates. This was accomplished — to our amazement — without opposition, but when we rushed through the smoke of the petards into the fort we found it empty. The gates on the west side of the enclosure stood open: the garrison had fled.

I raced madly for the western portal, and Martin with me.

"'Tis no matter," he protested. "They have scattered to the forest, and the Crique braves will make short work of them there."

"But Michel Barre was among them. I promised to kill him; and kill him I will. I shall have no peace of mind until he lies dead at my feet."

At the gate we scanned the open ground to the west. The enemy's men were flying in all directions, and on the river several boats filled with them had put out for the other shore; but, look as I would, I could see nowhere the huge form of mine own peculiar foe. The French were in pursuit. We hastened then to shore, and examined as best we could at that distance the occupants of the boats; but I felt certain fat Michel was not among them. As we watched, the Spaniards landed at various points along the shore and disappeared in the forest. Minutes passed. There was a chill smile on Martin's face.

At last there rang out from the far woods a long, quavering, terrible cry.

Satouriona's warriors were at their promised work!

XXIX

AN IRONIC ENDING

All day that grisly man-hunt continued in the murky depths of the jungle, where the Crique braves hunted for their victims among the great trees and matted thickets. The forest seemed alive with flitting, dusky forms that stalked noiselessly upon their prey. The very air reeked of terror. There even arose in my heart a regret that we had loosed the copper-hued fiends upon any men of our own color — until, in my search for Michel Barre, I chanced upon a certain glade in the woods not far from the fort.

It was a charnel house, that little opening in the trees, where dead men's bones lay scattered, the bones of my friends and countrymen, long since picked clean by bird or beast, bleached white by sun and rain. A few still swung at the ends of rotten ropes, rattling in the fitful wind. A vast sorrow came over me. I came to a large tree whereon was fixed a stained and weathered board, with an inscription almost obliterated. I deciphered it with difficulty, for letters once bold had faded entirely away in places; and it did say: THIS IS DONE, NOT AS TO FRENCHMEN, BUT AS TO LUTHERANS AND HERETICS — 'twas even as Michel Barre had boasted to me so long ago. As I read, my momentary doubt about enlisting the barbarians in our cause vanished from my heart, replaced by a fierce,

horrified protest against those cruel bigots of Spain.

When I returned to the fort after a fruitless quest for Michel Barre, I found that the French had drawn off with their prisoners after a short pursuit, leaving the rest to the red men, and were engaged in dismantling Fort San Mateo. Dominic de Gourges was jubilant.

"We have taken a large amount of needful goods," he cried, at sight of me, "stores of ammunition, supplies of all kinds, nine culverins! Some wounded we have, but not a man lost. We have been entirely successful. Forty odd prisoners — "

I interrupted him there to describe that place in the forest I had but left.

"Aye, I had meant to seek that place. Our friends must have a Christian burial. Visit the same spot at sunset of this day," he concluded, with a sombre and ominous glance at the group of Spanish prisoners near by, "and you shall see such a sight as will pleasure your eyes."

With that he left me; and shortly thereafter I saw him marching in the direction from which I had just come, followed by soldiers bearing implements for digging.

The pursuit was now almost over. Only an occasional whoop sounded, far away in the forest; Crique warriors were straggling back into the clearing with their horrible trophies.

Our ships lay quiet in the river, and above them its placid surface was alive with caneus plying from shore to shore, or floating, while their owners fished

for their evening meal in its cloudy waters. I had seen nothing of Satouriona. The Deer, most likely, was still away in the forest. Martin Belcastel was nowhere to be seen. On one of the bastions a party of Frenchmen swore and hauled and sweated, as they pulled down from its place one of the long brass culverins; so I turned my steps in that direction, with the intention of looking on while they dismounted the weapon. As I passed through the portal, where the heavy gates hung awry upon their hinges, I met with two Crique braves, who saluted me with grave nods of their feathered heads, and pointed with grunts of satisfaction to the scalps which hung at their girdles.

The fort was deserted except for the working party. I sat down upon a grassy bank in the shade of a house and gave myself up to meditation, being half sick with disappointment that the arch-villain, fat Michel, had escaped me. He above all others deserved death — the death I had promised him at our parting, months before. After a time my thoughts went back to France and occupied themselves with rosy dreams of the future, of Marie, of Breault, of a happy life in my beloved Gascony. Little did I dream of the depths to which France was to descend because of the dissensions and bigotry of her people; or of that bitter strife which was to keep me for the next twenty years constantly on the march, ever in the saddle, until our good Henry of Navarre was firmly seated on the throne. And while I sat thus, the sun pursued his way steadily down the sky to the west; shadows grew

longer; and the soldiers, unnoticed by me, dragged their last cannon from the fort.

I was aroused from my reverie by the appearance of a band of savages, bearing venison and strings of fresh-caught fish. They established themselves near by and set about preparing their evening meal. Soon fish and deermeat, spitted on green twigs, were broiling over the fires, and exhaling such pleasant odors that I felt a huge hunger. I determined to join them; and had risen to my feet, when I beheld a small party of men approaching me at a rapid pace. In the lead were Martin Belcastel and the Deer, while behind them followed a large and familiar figure guarded by four Crique braves. It was Michel Barre!

His clothing was torn; there was a livid bruise just below his one serviceable eye; he was dirty and travel-stained; yet he walked with his usual lightness. His gaze was bent upon the ground as though in deep thought, and it was not until he halted before me that he raised his head. There was the trace of a satiric smile about his thick lips; and the irony so habitual to him still looked out of his eye as it met mine. He said nothing, but stood waiting. The Deer stepped forward, drew himself to his full magnificent height, and addressed me.

"The Deer brings you greetings, O Nutcha! And he brings you this man of great size, who is your enemy. This was a long trail, but the forest is the home of the Deer. He reads the signs upon the ground as easily as he walks. This man fled far and fast to the southward to warn his chief of the coming

of your people. But the Deer ran yet faster upon his trail, and the Deer's brothers, the Criques, were with him. An hour past the nooning we fell upon the white man and took him alive. Thus does the Deer pay his debt to Nutcha."

This was the longest speech I had ever known my red-skinned friend to make; and I was rather at a loss for an answer, being a downright man, and not practised in the flowing language which these savages affect upon such occasions. But I made such shift as I could to reply.

"The Deer is famed for his strength and his swiftness in the hunt. Nutcha thanks the Deer and his brothers of the Crique nation for this captive. On the morrow, presents shall be given them as a token of Nutcha's friendship and the gratitude he feels toward his brothers."

The Deer stepped aside and left me face to face with Michel Barre.

"So we meet again, Master Traitor," I cried.

"As I predicted, monsieur," he replied, in a smooth tone.

"Ah, yes! You made a prophecy, and I made a promise."

"So you did; so you did," he said, in the same tone as before.

"I had intended to kill you without mercy," I continued, as I rolled back my sleeves, "but I find that I cannot kill an unarmed man. I shall give you a chance for your life, murderer and traitor though you are. Monsieur Belcastel will lend you a sword and

we will fight, here and now, to the end. If you can kill me, Master Barre, you shall have an hour's start before any pursuit is made."

I turned to Martin. "I call upon you, Martin Belcastel, to make my word good."

"Had rather have seen him hanged," Martin grumbled. "This is a weakness, Blaise. 'Tis more than fair play. This man has earned certain death."

"I must do this in my own way," I said.

He bowed, drew his weapon and presented it to my enemy, who bowed likewise as he received it. The Criques observed these actions with curious eyes, but, as soon as they understood what was toward, drew back and gave us room. Michel Barre said no word, but looked about him carefully. The footing was good; some ten paces to the left was a log house with a narrow passage between it and the next building; to the right was the high wall of the fort. I came on guard; the big man did likewise; and an instant later our blades met.

From the very first Michel Barre contented himself with avoiding the thrusts I aimed at him. Not one counter-thrust did he return. He fell back continually before my attack; baffled my efforts by opposing no resistance to them, so that I made no progress whatever. I became impatient and pressed him harder than ever, but with the same result. He retreated constantly. It was maddening.

"The devil!" I exclaimed, in a rage. "Fight now, you dog!"

"I fight in my own way, Master Cockerel," was his

placid rejoinder; and an evil smile made its appearance on his broad face.

In desperation, I made three rapid thrusts, and he gave back three steps before them. The jeering smile on his countenance broadened to a mocking grin; and there came into his eyes an enigmatic expression which I could not read. Martin's voice rang out behind me in warning.

"Careful, Blaise!" And again, "Watch him!"

It was not until then, so intent had I been on the business in hand, that I noticed how much ground he had given. Michel Barre stood at the entrance to the passage between the houses. Even as I saw it, I sent a terrible thrust in his direction. I destined it to end the conflict, but it spent itself in empty air. He had vanished!

Before I could recover from that last lunge, he was halfway down the passage, running swiftly. I sprang after him; and as I did so Martin passed me, going the other way round. I gained the corner in time to behold him dart around another building some distance off. I redoubled my speed, cursing myself for a witless dolt. The first shades of twilight were falling, and I feared to lose him among the cluttered buildings of the fort. When next I saw my quarry he had actually run lightly among the startled Criques, sprawled about their fires, and was in full flight toward a low, squat, windowless building near by — the fort's magazine! As I in my turn ran among them, two of the savages had so far recovered from their surprise as to spring to their feet, and before I

could check myself or turn I had run full tilt into them. Clutching at nothing in my attempts to save myself a fall, I staggered back into the nearest fire, sending out as I did so a shower of sparks.

Instantly, a blinding white flash of fire ran like a serpent along the ground, following hard upon the fleeing Michel. He had almost gained the protection of the wall when there came a subdued growl, as of distant thunder, from beneath his very feet. The earth rocked and pitched violently; the roof rose from the building as though plucked therefrom by a giant's hand; the walls broke up and flew outward. A tall column of flame, red, yellow, green, shot heavenward with a hissing roar. In the intense light, I had a momentary glimpse of my fugitive soaring in air like some vast bird of the night, driven out from an unknown hiding-place. I was swept from my feet by a great wind; sprang up at once, only to be beaten to the earth again, well-nigh senseless, by a shower of fragments from the roof and walls. For a moment I could not understand what had happened; then it came to me. The shower of coals, spread out fanwise by my clumsy feet, had lighted a powder train which had exploded the magazine!

As I lay there for an instant, I heard Martin's voice shouting my name. In a cloud of acrid, sulphurous smoke which almost choked me with coughing, I got upon my feet, and stood there staring at the sword still clenched in my hand.

"Are you hurt?"

I shook my head, being dizzy and shaken, with a

great buzzing and ringing in my ears. Martin led me to a place where the smoke had dispersed; and in the clearer air I looked about. Four or five Criques lay cowering in fear near by; a deep hole, still smoking with the fumes of the explosion, gaped where the powder magazine had lately stood; flames, red in the dusk, were springing up in the dry grasses around us, and farther off a roof was already blazing.

"And the fat prophet — where is he?" asked Martin. "Has he escaped us again?"

"Nay, we are rid of him at last," I answered, with a strangely mingled feeling of relief and regret in my heart. I described to Martin the manner of his death — for dead I surely thought him.

"Let us make certain of that," said Martin, "for he may even yet cheat his master, the Devil."

We found him, after a short search by the light of the ever-growing flames, half buried under a twisted mass of timbers. His face was seared and scorched out of all semblance to anything human; a few shreds of clothing clung to his enormous body, broken and battered. But there was still a flutter of life in him; for as I stood looking down, his lips moved and a whisper came from them. We knelt to listen, but for some time could distinguish nothing intelligible.

Then — "forgot the powder train — trapped — my own device." He fell silent then for a time and we thought he was gone; but he fell to mumbling again.

"Maladetta! — The Scarlet Cockerel wins the last main!"

And the spirit of Michel Barre took its flight.

XXX

A SHORT COURSE AND SOON RUN

And now, messieurs, the task is almost done; and a grievous one it has been to a man who has no clerkly trick of words.

All night the flames leaped and crackled among the buildings of Fort San Mateo; and when Dominic de Gourges arrived on the scene, he ordered the torch applied to the walls, thus completing the destruction. Everything of value had been removed, he assured us, and was at the water's edge to be embarked on the ships.

By my faith! It joyed my heart to see that vipers' nest crumble to ashes in a fire of our lighting.

"We owe thanks to le bon Dieu," was the comment of Dominic de Gourges, when we related to him the story of all that preceded the explosion, "for it was only His hand that turned this fat rogue's weapon against him and saved us such a death as fell to Master Barre himself."

At dawn began the embarkation of the captured culverins and stores. I strolled off toward the forest with Martin for company; and my feet turned, almost without intention, to that quiet clearing which I had visited on the previous day. The pitiful piles of bleaching bones had disappeared. The glade was

tenanted now by a new company — whirling, nodding, bowing, swaying, each at a rope's end.

The weathered placard of the Spaniard, with its words of shame, was gone, replaced by a new and shining one upon which were these words: THIS IS DONE, NOT AS TO SPANIARDS, NOR AS TO CATHOLICS, BUT AS UNTO MURDERERS.

Martin's face was impassive as he looked at this answer that Frenchmen had made to the murderers of Frenchmen; he made no comment. But the place chilled me; I could not repress a shudder when we looked back as we left.

Martin saw the movement. He shrugged his shoulders.

" 'Tis a weakness, Blaise, to feel pity for these human wolves," he broke out, in a stern voice. "This is but justice — nothing more."

" 'Tis a hard sight to look upon, nevertheless," I answered.

"That's life, Blaise — full of hard sights and lovely ones, cowardice and courage, meanness and nobility. One must meet both the bad and the good, the bitter and the sweet, as becomes a valiant gentleman."

After that we fell into silence.

The same day came Satouriona, magnificent in feathered robes of ceremony, followed by a great train bearing gifts, to bid us farewell. Many presents were given by both parties; and it was thus that I came by the two suits of doeskin, worked in wondrous colors with quills and embroidery of hair, that have hung these many years in the armory at Breault. Once

more we bade farewell to our friend, the Deer; spoke for the last time to Satouriona and his people. We watched them out of sight on the smooth face of the dark stream that had been the scene of so many of our adventures.

The following day, at mid-morning, our anchors were raised, our sails were loosed to the wind, and the little fleet sailed down the river and into the open sea. A few hours later I had gazed my last on the New World and turned my thoughts homeward to France, where happiness awaited me. We made a quick voyage before strong favoring winds and on the eighth of June in 1568 dropped anchor in the harbor of La Rochelle. An hour later I landed, and soon after that was riding hard for Paris on post horses, accompanied by a protesting and grumbling Martin, who was sure, he said, that the lady would wait a few hours longer after waiting thus long.

Straightway on our arrival in the capital, having removed the stains of travel from my person, I was thundering on the door of Monsieur le Comte de la Costa. It was opened promptly by a lackey whom I remembered. He stared at me in surprise.

"Announce me to Mademoiselle de la Costa, Jehan, and to no one else, mind you, or I'll cut off your ears."

He smiled and bowed, opened wide the door for me to enter, and hurried off to do my bidding. I had not long to wait until I heard the sharp tap of tiny heels on the steps of the stair. Marie descended. When I looked up and saw her thus, a great thrill ran over me. There was that upon her sweet face

and glowing in her deep eyes which repaid me amply for the past months of loneliness. Ah, mes amis, there is no finer moment in life!

I held out my arms, expecting that she would come into them; but she shook her head and smiled.

"What do you bring me, Blaise, my lover?" she asked in a low voice.

I remembered, then, her last words to me in the little garden: "Come back as valiant and honorable as you went."

"I bring you a complete victory, vengeance for your father's death, and a clean honor, sweetheart," I answered.

"And — ?"

"And my whole heart's love."

At that she smiled gloriously and came into my embrace. And thus we stood, fast-locked in each other's arms, when Monsieur le Comte and Martin came upon us and gave us their blessing.

No great time after that we were wedded, and we journeyed by easy stages southward to Breault, there to begin that peaceful and happy life of which I had dreamed in the fallen fort far away in the wilderness.

So ended the adventures of The Scarlet Cockerel.

Martin announced to us his intention of retiring to the tranquil estate of Belcastel, giving up forever his wandering about the world in search of new hazards; but I was not much surprised when he turned up at Breault a twelvemonth later, for the wars had broken out anew. His restless spirit could

brook no longer the quiet life of a country gentleman. We took the field together under the banners of Condé and Coligny.

But those years of conflict have no place in the present chronicle. They belong to the life of Blaise de Breault.

THE Charles Boardman Hawes prize contest brought scores of manuscripts to the Atlantic offices, and two others were so close to the winner in merit that they are published simultaneously with THE SCARLET COCKEREL. These are

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